

## *The Huns and the End of the Roman Empire in Western Europe\**

BASED on the Mediterranean, the Roman Empire forged Europe as far as the rivers Rhine and Danube – and, for lengthy periods, extensive lands beyond those boundaries – together with North Africa and much of the Near East into a unitary state which lasted for the best part of 400 years. The protracted negotiations required to bring just some of this area together in the European Community put the success of this Empire into perspective. Yet since the publication of Gibbon's masterpiece (and long before), its very success has served only to stimulate interest in why it ended, 'blame' being firmly placed on everything from an excess of Christian piety to the effect of lead water pipes.<sup>1</sup> The aim of this paper is to reconsider some of the processes and events which underlay the disappearance of the western half of the Roman Empire in the fifth century AD. This was an area encompassing essentially modern Britain, France, Benelux, Italy, Austria, Hungary, the Iberian Peninsula, and North Africa as far east as Libya, whose fragmentation culminated in the deposition of Romulus Augustulus on or around 4 September 476. That groups of outsiders – so-called 'barbarians' – played an important role in all this has never been doubted. A full understanding of the barbarians' involvement in a whole sequence of events, taking the best part of a hundred years, lends, however, an unrecognized coherence to the story of western imperial collapse.

There are two main reasons why this coherence has not been highlighted before. First, most of the main barbarian groups which were later to establish successor states to the Roman Empire in western Europe, had crossed the frontier by about AD 410, yet the last western Roman emperor was not deposed until 476, some sixty-five years later. I will argue, however (and this provides the main focus for the second half of the paper), that the initial invasions must not be separated from the full

\* It is a great pleasure to thank the friends and colleagues who have read this paper in draft: David D'Avray, Neil McLynn, John Matthews, Bryan Ward-Perkins, and Michael Whitby. A version of it was given to the Oxford 'After Rome' seminar, and I benefited from the many helpful observations of its participants, as also from the comments of the Editor of this *Review* and the anonymous referees.

For the convenience of readers unfamiliar with the period, references to standard editions and English translations where available have been given on the first occasion a text is cited. The following abbreviations have also been used: AM = Ammianus Marcellinus, ed. C. U. Clark (2 vols., Berlin, 1910–15), Eng. trans. Loeb or (abridged) Penguin Classics; CM, i, ii = *Chronica Minora*, ed. Th. Mommsen (2 vols., MGH, AA, vols. ix, xi, Berlin, 1892–4); CSEL = *Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum*; C.Th. = *Codex Theodosianus*, ed. Mommsen and P. Meyer (Berlin, 1904–5); N. Val. = *New Laws of the Emperor Valentinian III*, ed. Mommsen and Meyer, *Codex Theodosianus*, vol. ii; PL = *Patrologia Latina*; PLRE, i, ii = *The Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire*. Vol. I: AD 260–395. Vol. II: AD 395–527 (Cambridge, 1971–80).

1. For standard surveys, see *infra* p. 38, n. 2.

working-out of their social and political consequences. Not just the invasions themselves need to be examined, but also the longer-term reactions to them of the Roman population of western Europe, and especially its landowning elites. While the western Empire did not die quickly or easily, a direct line of historical cause and effect nonetheless runs from the barbarian invasions of the late fourth and early fifth centuries to the deposition of Romulus Augustulus. The second reason lies in modern understandings of what caused the different groups of outsiders to cross into the Empire in the first place. These population movements did not happen all at once, but were stretched out over about thirty-five years, c. 376–410. Here again, however, a close re-examination of the evidence reveals that the years of invasion represent no more than different phases of a single crisis. In particular, the two main phases of population movement – c. 376–86 and 405–8 – were directly caused by the intrusion of Hunnic power into the fringes of Europe.

The Huns were very much a new factor in the European strategic balance of power in the late fourth century. A group of Eurasian nomads, they moved west, sometime after AD 350, along the northern coast of the Black Sea, the western edge of the great Eurasian Steppe. Illiterate, and not even leaving a second-hand account of their origins and history in any Graeco-Roman source, they remain deeply mysterious. Opinions differ even over their linguistic affiliation, but the best guess would seem to be that the Huns were the first group of Turkic, as opposed to Iranian, nomads to have intruded into Europe.<sup>1</sup> Whatever the answer to that question, the first half of this study will reconsider their impact upon the largely Germanic groups of central and eastern Europe which had previously been the main focus of Roman foreign policy on Rhine and Danube.

For the Roman imperial authorities, the first consequence of the arrival of Hunnic tribes on the fringes of Europe was the appearance in 376 of two substantial and separate Gothic groups, Tervingi and Greuthungi, on the banks of the Danube asking for asylum. That the activities of the Huns lay behind this request is well documented in Ammianus Marcellinus (by far the fullest of the contemporary accounts), and other primary sources.<sup>2</sup> It can also be found in every secondary account of the period. Close examination of the best evidence, however, suggests that the precise nature of the action has been misunderstood. The events of 376 are generally portrayed in terms of panic-stricken Goths fleeing to

1. O. J. Maenchen-Helfen, *The World of the Huns* (Berkeley, 1973), ch. 9.

2. E.g. AM 31. 2. 1; 3. 1 ff.; Eunapius, ed. (with Eng. trans.) R. C. Blockley, *The Fragmentary Classicising Historians of the Later Roman Empire: Eunapius, Olympiodorus, Priscus and Malchus*, vol. ii (Liverpool, 1983), fr. 41. 1, 42; Zosimus, *New History*, 4. 20. 3 ff., ed. L. Mendelssohn (Leipzig, 1885), Eng. trans. R. T. Ridley (Canberra, 1982); Socrates, *Ecclesiastical History* [henceforth HE], 4. 34, ed. R. Hussey (Oxford, 1853), Eng. trans., *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*; Sozomen, *Ecclesiastical History* [henceforth HE], 6. 37, ed. J. Bidez (Berlin, 1960), Eng. trans., *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*; Ambrose, *Expositio Evangelii secundum Lucam*, 10. 10, CSEL, xxxii. 458.

the river Danube before a solid mass of Huns, who had suddenly swept all before them, such a vision being firmly rooted in the rhetoric of the surviving sources.<sup>1</sup> But while there is no doubt that the Goths came to the Danube because of the Huns, the cumulative effect of the detail in Ammianus' account, especially when viewed in the light of other events beyond the frontier in the two decades or so after 376, makes it necessary to revise traditional conceptions of what precisely was happening.

To start with, the Huns did not overturn the established tribal pattern north of the Black Sea as quickly as has often been imagined. As Ammianus reports, they first attacked the Alans, another nomadic pastoralist group – situated at this date east of the river Don – and then, in company with some of them, turned on the easternmost Goths, the Greuthungi of Ermenaric. Nothing is said about the duration of the attacks on the Alans; but they had a warlike reputation and are unlikely to have been easily subdued.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, there was a considerable time-lag between the first attacks on the Greuthungi, and the arrival of Goths on the Danube in 376. Ermenaric first resisted the Huns 'for a long time' (*diu*: 31. 3. 2), and, after his death, Vithimer, his successor, continued the fight 'for some time' (*aliquantisper*). He eventually died in battle, but only after 'many... defeats' (*multas... clades*: 31. 3. 3). It was Vithimer's death which directly precipitated the appearance of the two Gothic groups on the Danube (31. 3. 3–4. 1).<sup>3</sup> While no more than a few months need separate Vithimer's death from the arrival of Goths on the Danube, the period between the first Hunnic attacks on the Alans and Vithimer's death was clearly more considerable. Ammianus' chronological indicators are vague, but strongly suggest an overall time frame (encompassing Hunnic attacks upon the Alans, Ermenaric's resistance and Vithimer's defeats) reckoned in years rather than months: surely a minimum of (say) five campaigning seasons, and quite probably somewhat longer. My own instinct is that Ammianus is briefly summarizing the events of more like ten to twenty years, rather than the year or so which is generally allowed.<sup>4</sup>

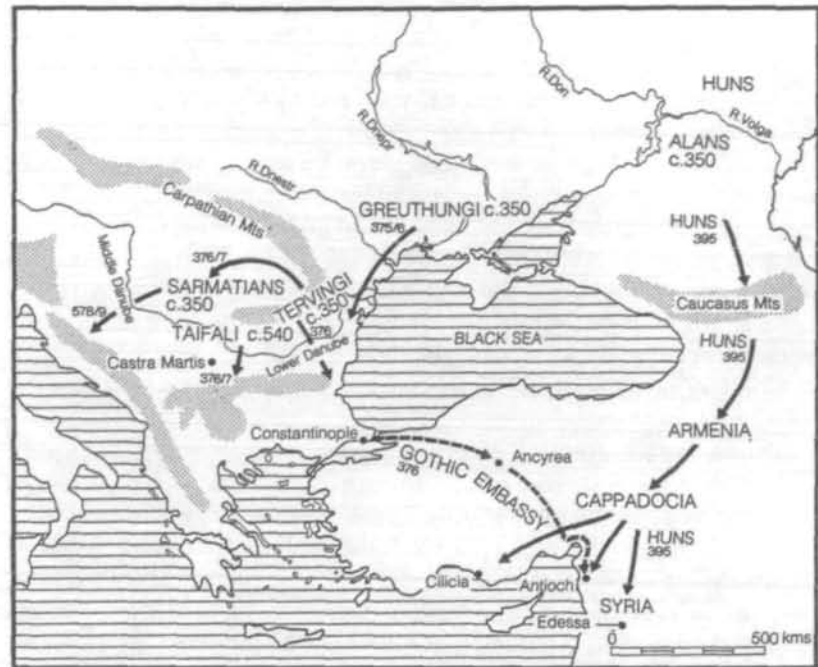
Nor does Ammianus give any indication that Huns were pressing directly upon those Goths who came to the Danube in 376. For instance,

1. Eunapius, ed. Blockley, fr. 42; cf. AM, 31. 2. 1–12; Zosimus, 4. 20. 3 ff.; Jordanes, *Getica* 24. 123–8, ed. Th. Mommsen, vol. vi. 1 (MGH, AA, Berlin, 1882), Eng. trans. C. Mierow (Chicago, 1915). Secondary accounts: e.g. Maenchen-Helfen, *World of the Huns*, pp. 26–7; L. Schmidt, *Geschichte der deutschen Stämme bis zum Ausgang der Völkerwanderung: Die Ostgermanen* (2nd edn., Munich, 1934), pp. 400 ff.; H. Wolfram, *History of the Goths* (Berkeley, 1988), pp. 71–2; E. Demougeot, *La Formation de l'Europe et les invasions barbares*. Vol. II: *De l'avènement de Dioclétien (284) à l'occupation germanique de l'empire romain d'occident (début du VI<sup>e</sup> siècle)* (Paris, 1979), pp. 138–9, 383 ff.; E. A. Thompson, *A History of Attila and the Huns* (Oxford, 1946), pp. 21 ff.; F. Altheim, *Attila und die Hunnen* (Baden-Baden, 1951), pp. 79 ff.

2. Attacks: AM, 31. 2. 12, 3. 1. Reputation: e.g. *ibid.* 31. 2. 22. Alans operated in a number of separate groups: see *infra*, p. 13, n. 3.

3. Even so, Athanaric had time to try to build fortifications against the Huns: AM, 31. 3. 4–8.

4. I thus have in mind a situation similar to that in which several years of Suevic harassment caused the movement of the Usipetes and the Tenctheri in the first century BC: Caesar, *Gallie War*, 4. 1. AD 375 is the usual date given for the Huns' arrival: e.g. Demougeot, *Les invasions barbares*, p. 384 (but cf. her



Map 1: The Arrival of the Huns

Indeed, even in 395 – nearly twenty years after the first Gothic crossing – the Hunnic centre of gravity was situated not beside the Danube, but much further east. In this year, many Huns crossed the Caucasus. Greek, Latin, and Syriac sources describe the subsequent devastation, as one group moved south and east towards Persia, and another attacked Roman territories in Armenia, Cappadocia, and Syria, reaching as far west as the cities of Antioch, Edessa, and Cilicia (Map 1). The size of the incursion is indicated by chronology as well as geographical range; fighting in the Roman Empire continued into 397 and very possibly 398.<sup>1</sup> It is normally reckoned that the obviously very substantial forces involved in these attacks were Danubian Huns who decided for once to outflank Roman defences by taking an unexpected route, but the distances involved make this exceedingly unlikely. The often aired view that there was also a substantial Hunnic raid across the

thrown off Hunnic dominion, but this rests purely on the supposition that the Huns had conquered all Goths north of the Danube in 375–6.

1. Best account: Maenchen-Helfen, *World of the Huns*, pp. 52–9 (with refs.), who is perhaps too confident in interpreting the raid of Basich and Kurich as another account of the attack. For an alternative view, dating this raid to 420–2, see Blockley, *Fragmentary Classicising Historians*, ii. 386–7, nn. 66–8.

the decision of Tervingi to seek asylum within the Roman Empire involved first a *comp d'état* (replacing Athanaric with Fritigern and Alavivus), then long deliberation about how best to escape the Hunnic threat (*dinque deliberans*: AM 31. 3. 8), and finally an approach to the local imperial commanders for permission to cross the frontier. These in turn referred the matter to the Emperor Valens, to whom the Goths despatched embassies (31. 4. 1). But Valens was actually in Antioch,<sup>1</sup> so that, even after their own internal political manoeuvring, the Goths had to wait patiently beside the Danube while their ambassadors made a round trip of over a thousand kilometres each way (cf. Map 1) and Valens made up his mind. The whole process must have taken some months,<sup>2</sup> during which we hear of no further Hunnic attacks. None of this is consonant with the idea that Huns were breathing down the Goths' necks.

It was, in fact, not until some years later that Hunnic groups established themselves as the major foreign power actually on Rome's Danube frontier. Hunnic raiding parties operated close to, and even south of, the Danube after 376;<sup>3</sup> but for some time other Gothic groups remained the major concern for the Empire in the region. Tervingi loyal to Athanaric, for instance, drove some Sarmatians out of Caucalanda – somewhere in the Carpathians – to establish a new settlement area for themselves. These men were perhaps identical with the Goths of one Arimer, who maintained an independent Gothic kingdom north of the Danube after 383.<sup>4</sup> More strikingly, another primarily Gothic group led by one Odotheus attempted to break across the river Danube in 386. Less significant for our purpose than the success of Theodosius' counter-expedition is the clear indication this provides that Goths still remained the main threat north of the Danube a full decade after 376.<sup>5</sup>

survey of evidence for earlier trouble further east: pp. 366 ff.; Altheim, *Attila*, pp. 57, 77. The idea that Ermenaric commanded a vast empire has contributed greatly to visions of a sudden Gothic collapse: e.g. Maenchen-Helfen, *World of the Huns*, pp. 12–13; Altheim, *Attila*, pp. 63 ff. This is based on the sixth-century Jordanes, *Getica*, 23. 116–20, which hugely exaggerates Ermenaric's authority: P. J. Heather, 'Cassiodorus and the Rise of the Amals: Genealogy and the Goths under Hunnic Domination', *J[ournal of] R[oman] S[tudies]*, lxxix (1989), 103–28, at 110–16. Cf. id., *Goths and Romans*, 332–489 (Oxford, 1991), pp. 14, 86–9: his realm was probably only one of several.

1. Persia and Rome were at loggerheads over Armenia: AM, 27. 12, 29. 1, 30. 2.

2. The 'Archive of Theophanes' (AD 320) shows that an official traveller could average about forty Roman miles per day: C. H. Roberts and E. G. Turner (ed.), *Rylands Papyri*, vol. iv (Manchester, 1952), pp. 105–6. The imperial post is thought to have managed about fifty Roman miles a day, special couriers with changes of horses probably more like 150: A. M. Ramsay, 'The Speed of the Imperial Post', *JRS*, xv (1925), 60–74. The distance from the Danube to Antioch via Constantinople and Ancyra (the main road) is c. 1,200 Roman miles.

3. One made an alliance with the Goths south of the river in 377: AM, 31. 8. 4 ff. (cf. *infra*, p. 10); other Huns and 'Carpo-Dacians' were repulsed in c. 380: Zosimus, 4. 34. 6.

4. Caucalanda: AM, 31. 4. 13. Arimer and his Goths: H. Achelis, 'Der älteste deutsche Kalender', *Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft*, 1 (1900), 308–35, at 310 ff.; cf. Wolfram, *History of the Goths*, p. 135 (contra E. A. Thompson, *The Visigoths in the Time of Ulfila* (Oxford, 1966), pp. 159–60). See further P. J. Heather and J. F. Matthews, *The Goths in the Fourth Century* (Liverpool, 1991), pp. 125 ff.; cf. Heather, *Goths and Romans*, pp. 154, 337.

5. Zosimus, 4. 35. 1, 37–9; Claudian, *de IV cons. Hon.*, 626 ff., ed. with Eng. trans. M. Platnauer (Loeb, Cambridge, Mass., 1922); *Cons. Const.*, s.a. 386, CM, i. 244. Odotheus is often said to have

Danube in 395 is based on a misreading of the sources.<sup>1</sup> If these were Huns already looming over the Danube, they would surely not have dragged themselves (and their horses) the thousand kilometres or so around the north and eastern shores of the Black Sea and through a rugged mountain range. All the journey's hardships (for man and beast) could only have reduced their fighting abilities long before they could even begin to plunder.<sup>2</sup> The size and direction of this incursion, combined with the absence of anything on a similar scale from the west in this period, thus indicate that the bulk of the Huns were still well to the east of Rome's Danubian frontier in 395.

This is not to say that there were no Huns at all further west by 395. In 383/4, Valentinian II had paid Huns and Alans to attack trouble-making Alamanni close to the Rhine frontier,<sup>3</sup> and the Huns who joined the Goths south of the Danube in 377 seem to have remained inside Roman borders, serving on the campaign against Maximus in 388.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, the Huns did not have to come west themselves to cause convulsions in more distant lands by indirect displacement. Some Alans were conquered by Huns, for instance, but many others moved west; Gratian encountered some at Castra Martis, west of the Carpathians, in 378 (AM 31. 11. 6), later recruited others into his army (Zosimus 4. 35. 2), and there were still more at large in 406 to join in the Rhine crossing.<sup>5</sup> Likewise, Sarmatians of the middle Danube were displaced into Roman territory by retreating Goths (AM 31. 4. 13), as were the Taifali of Oltenia (31. 9. 2 ff.; cf. Map 1). It may even have been the continued uncertainty generated by these movements which made some Marcomanni ready to entrust themselves to Roman protection in 395/6.<sup>6</sup> By c. 395, then, there had been considerable displacement east and west of the Carpathians, of which, as the sources insist,<sup>7</sup> the Huns were the root

1. Philostorgius, *Ecclesiastical History*, ed. J. Bidez (Leipzig, 1913), XI. 8, is not referring to a specific incident (cf. Maenchen-Helfen, *World of the Huns*, p. 53), and the crucial phrase in Nicephorus Callistus (the apparent source of this fragment) is explicitly a description of Gothic, not Hunnic, activity. Likewise, the enemy threatening the Balkans in 395 in Claudian, *In Ruf.* II. 26 ff., esp. 36 ff., is Alaric the Goth: Maenchen-Helfen, *World of the Huns*, p. 53.

2. Ibid., p. 51, where the Huns are imagined coming from west of the Don in 395. It would be in line with my argument to have most Huns at this point between (say) the Don and Dniester (see Map 1), but they may have been still further east. Maenchen-Helfen's argument is based on Priscus' record of the raid of Basich and Kurich, but this is perhaps a different episode: see *supra*, p. 8, n. 1. In 449 Attila threatened to launch a similar raid over the Caucasus from his Danube base (Priscus, ed. Blockley, 16. fr. 11. 2, p. 276), but this was after he had already exhausted the Balkans, and in the end he preferred to attack western Europe.

3. Ambrose, *Ep.* 30 (24), CSEL, lxxxii. 207–15. These could have been Roman auxiliary troops from within the Empire, but the precise wording of the letter suggests not.

4. Heather, *Goths and Romans*, pp. 144–6, 157.

5. See *infra*, p. 13, n. 3.

6. Paulinus v. Ambros., 8. 36, ed. A. A. R. Bastiaensen (Verona, 1975), p. 100: it is not clear that these Marcomanni were resettled inside the Empire.

7. Ambrose, *Expositio Evangelii secundum Lucam*, 10. 10 (CSEL, xxxii. 458), written c. 380, best captures the continuing threat: 'The Huns threw themselves upon the Alans, the Alans upon the Goths, and the Goths upon the Taifali and Sarmatae; the Goths, exiled from their own country made us exiles in Illyricum, and this is not yet the end.'

cause, even if, by that date, they had not themselves moved very far west in large numbers. It is only, in fact, in c. 400 that a substantial Hunnic force, that of Uldin, is attested close to the lower Danube east of the Carpathians, and, as we shall see, there is even reason to doubt that his presence signifies the arrival of the mass of the Huns on Rome's doorstep (*infra*, page 15).

The available sources are obviously fragmentary, but do nevertheless provide a coherent picture of the intrusion of Hunnic power into eastern Europe. Huns did not arrive *en masse* on the Danube as the result of a sudden surge in 375–6. Rather, a slow build-up of pressure precipitated a crisis among certain Goths, whose retreat westwards provoked a similar response among many of their neighbours: hence the arrival of two distinct Gothic groups on the Danube, and related displacements of Alans, Taifali, and Sarmatians. These groups were, moreover, not closely pursued by massed Huns, and other substantial Gothic groups remained independently powerful north of the Danube down to at least the mid-380s. The events of 395 further indicate that the bulk of the Huns remained much closer to the Don and Volga than to the Danube even twenty years after 376.

One other important feature of Hunnic activity complements this view of late fourth-century events. For, despite a contradictory account in one late source,<sup>1</sup> Hunnic tribes did not in this period form a unified body with a coherent set of aims. Rather, there appear in the sources a whole series of Hunnic raiding parties, each pursuing independent aims. The first raids on Ermenaric's Greuthungi, for instance, were mounted by Huns and Alans (AM 31. 3. 1); but other Huns, for payment, actually assisted the Greuthungi to resist them (31. 3. 3), while south of the Danube more Huns and Alans (Ammianus gives no indication that they were the same ones<sup>2</sup>) joined the Goths in autumn 377, on being promised a cut of any booty (31. 8. 4. ff.). At more or less the same time, we hear of Huns alone attacking another Gothic group, the Tervingi (31. 3. 5–8: in perhaps 375), and, in about 380, of Huns mixed with Carpo-Dacians (whatever they may be) being driven away from the frontier by Roman military action (Zosimus 4. 34. 6). We are faced, then, with a number of Hunnic groups involved with a variety of more or less willing allies (Alans, Carpo-Dacians, Goths), pursuing separate courses of action at more or less the same time.

This suggests very strongly that in c. 370–80 Hunnic raiders operated in disparate and hence, presumably, relatively small groups, under a variety of leaders. Such a view broadly coincides with Ammianus'

1. Jordanes, *Getica*, 24. 130, reports that a Hunnic king called 'Balamber' led attacks on the Goths, but this is confused memory of the later Gothic king Valamer: Heather, 'Cassiodorus and the Rise of the Amals', 105–6, 120–4.

2. Maenchen-Helfen, *World of the Huns*, pp. 22, 71–2, 80, 23.22, refers to the Hun-Alan alliance, but both operated in various small groups at this date, so that all references are not necessarily to the same mixed force.

account of the exercise of political authority among them: '[The Huns] are not subject to the authority of any king, but break through any obstacle in their path under the improvised command of their chief men.'<sup>1</sup> That characterization has its own puzzles, but Ammianus was clearly contrasting multiple leadership with monarchical authority.<sup>2</sup> In 412, similarly, the historian Olympiodorus encountered several leaders among the Huns; he refers explicitly to 'kings of the Huns'. At that time, these leaders also had some kind of internal ranking order, one being singled out as the 'first of the kings'.<sup>3</sup> We have no way of knowing whether Hunnic leaders of the 370s acknowledged such a hierarchy, but the Huns met at this date were, as we have seen, smaller groups geographically well in advance of the main body, and it is likely enough that some mechanism was required to keep order among the mass of the Huns.<sup>4</sup>

That we are dealing with small groups under independent leaders helps to explain, of course, why the intrusion of Hunnic power into eastern Europe did not take the form of one great conquest. The piecemeal activity of numerous Hunnic bands destabilized the general situation, provoking successive and prolonged crises for the Goths and other inhabitants of the Pontic region. Some episodes brought various groups to the Roman frontier, others resulted in subjection to various and no doubt competing Hunnic leaders.<sup>5</sup> The chronology and character of Hunnic activity fit together neatly, therefore, to generate an alternative view of what some German scholars have so evocatively called the *Hunnensturm*. And while it is broadly true that the Goths who came to the Danube in 376 were retreating under Hunnic pressure, these events represent only one moment in a slowly unfolding drama. All of this is critical to a full understanding of the role played by the Huns in the dismemberment of the western Roman Empire. For subsequent events on Rome's Rhine and Danube frontiers only make sense when it is realized that the eye of the *Hunnensturm* was still very much to the east in 376.

For ten years after the death of the Emperor Theodosius I in 395, the separate imperial regimes of east and west were largely concerned with internecine politics. The power vacuum left by the accession of the

1. 31. 2. 7: 'Aguntur autem nulla severitate regali, sed tumultuario primatum ductu contenti, perrumpunt quicquid inciderit'; trans. W. Hamilton (Penguin Classics).

2. Thompson, *Attila*, pp. 44 ff., has been rightly criticized for arguing that the Huns only had leaders in wartime, but he correctly detected the main contrast; cf. J. Harmatta, 'The Dissolution of the Hun Empire', *Acta Archaeologica Hungarica*, ii (1951), 277-304, at 289-91; Maenchen-Helfen, *World of the Huns*, pp. 12-13. Some of these have denied Ammianus' accuracy on the basis of Jordanes' Balamber, but see *supra* p. 10, n. 1.

3. Olympiodorus, ed. Blockley, fr. 19. For a similar structure among the fifth-century nomadic Akatziri: Priscus, ed. Blockley, fr. 11. 2, p. 258; cf. Harmatta, 'Dissolution', 294-5.

4. By nature, a nomadic way of life produces a dispersed population with layers of virtually independent leadership; cf. R. Cribb, *Nomads in Archaeology* (Cambridge, 1991), ch. 4.

5. See further Heather, *Goths and Romans*, pp. 227-30.



Emperor's two sons – both too young to govern – sparked off fierce competition between ambitious politicians and generals, and facilitated revolts among discontented forces within the Empire.<sup>1</sup> These included the Goths admitted in 376, or, rather, their descendants, who from 395, under the leadership of Alaric, exploited the political instability to make further demands of the Roman state.<sup>2</sup> In the middle part of the first decade of the fifth century, however, three major invasions convulsed virtually the entire length of the Empire's Rhine and Danube frontiers.

The first came in 405 when a Gothic king called Radagaisus invaded Italy. Some details escape us, essentially because Zosimus, a later writer, preserves only a garbled version of what he found in the contemporary history of Olympiodorus. Most glaringly, Zosimus reports that Radagaisus was defeated beyond the frontier, when he was actually captured at Fiesole and executed outside Florence. Likewise, according to Zosimus, Radagaisus gathered Celtic and German peoples beyond the Rhine and Danube, which suggests that he led a multi-racial force recruited from what is now southern Germany, Austria, and Bohemia. But other sources insist that Radagaisus was a Gothic leader, and it is noticeable that Zosimus' history nowhere mentions the Rhine crossing of 406 (see *infra*), which Olympiodorus' history would certainly have reported. Zosimus may well have confused, therefore, Radagaisus' invasion of Italy with the multi-racial penetration of the Rhine frontier which followed closely in its wake.<sup>3</sup> Such problems aside, two points are relevant to the present study. First, Radagaisus crossed the frontier with a very large force: some 12,000 of his followers seem to have been drafted into the Roman army after his defeat.<sup>4</sup> Second, the fact of his incursion into Italy suggests strongly that he invaded the Empire from somewhere in the middle Danubian area west of the Carpathians (cf. Map 1).<sup>5</sup> In 376, Goths had crossed the Lower Danube into Thrace; thirty years later, the action moved further west.

Radagaisus was executed on 23 August 406; four months later, on 31 December, groups from a number of different peoples crossed the Rhine

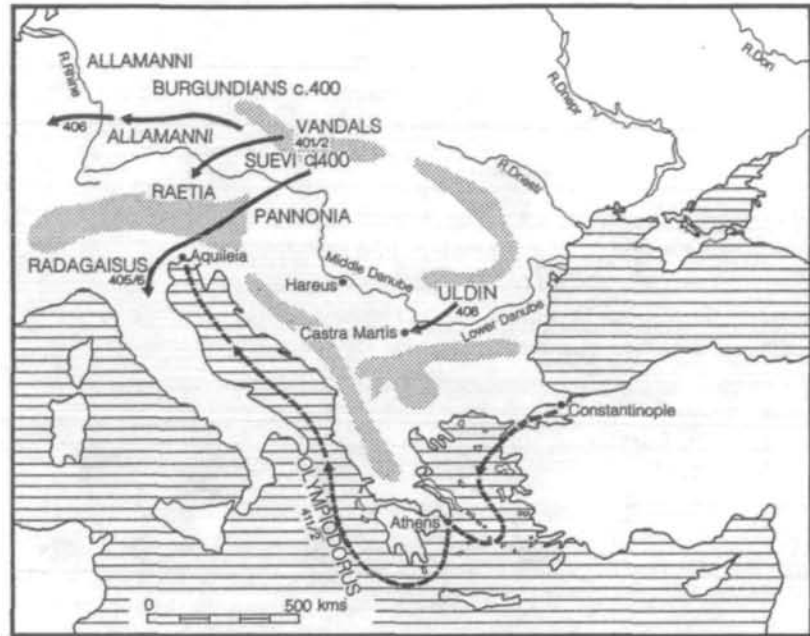
1. E.g. A. D. E. Cameron, *Claudian: Poetry and Propaganda at the Court of Honorius* (Oxford, 1970), chs. 4–7; J. F. Matthews, *Western Aristocracies and Imperial Court* (Oxford, 1975), ch. 10; E. Demougeot, *De l'unité à la division de l'empire romain, 395–410: Essai sur le gouvernement impérial* (Paris, 1951), pp. 119 ff.

2. Heather, *Goths and Romans*, chs. 5–6. For a contrary view, J. H. W. G. Liebeschuetz, *Barbarians and Bishops* (Oxford, 1990), pp. 48–85 (cf. Heather, *Goths and Romans*, pp. 193–6).

3. Zosimus, §. 26. 3–5; a similar account of his confusion is in Demougeot, *Les invasions barbares*, p. 422. Zosimus' history is dependent upon Olympiodorus from §. 26. 1 onwards. Radagaisus as Goth: Augustine, *De Civ. Dei*, §. 23, CSEL, xxx. 259; *Sermo*, 105. 10, 13, PL, xxxviii, cols. 622–5; Orosius, *Hist. adv. Pag.*, 7. 37. 4, ed. C. Zangmeister, CSEL, v (Vienna, 1882), Eng. trans. Library of the Fathers; Olympiodorus, ed. Blockley, fr. 9; Prosp. Tiro 1228 (a. 405), CM, i. 465; *Chron. Gall.*, 452 n. 50, CM, i. 652.

4. Olympiodorus, ed. Blockley, fr. 9. Photius' summary says '12,000 nobles', but this is usually taken as a confused total figure: e.g. Wolfram, *History of the Goths*, pp. 169–70; Heather, *Goths and Romans*, pp. 213–14.

5. E.g. Wolfram, *History of the Goths*, p. 169; Demougeot, *Les invasions barbares*, pp. 422–9; and (implicitly) Maenchen-Helfen, *World of the Huns*, pp. 60–1.



Map 2: The Crisis of 405-8

This would also appear to be true of the Burgundians. In the fourth century, Burgundian territory lay to the east of the Alamanni between the upper Rhine and Danube, perhaps on the other side of the old Roman *limes* abandoned in the third century. Their movements after 406 are not entirely clear, but by 411, and probably somewhat before, they were established right on the Rhine, if not actually west of it, probably in the region of Mainz. Theirs is not so spectacular an example of westward movement out of areas west of the Carpathians as that of the Vandals, Alans, and Suevi, but it certainly represents a similar phenomenon.<sup>1</sup> Within six months of Radagaisus' defeat, then, a whole series of other groups from similar areas west of the Carpathians had crossed the Roman frontier.

The third invasion involved the Hunnic leader Uldin and unfolded further to the east. Previously a Roman ally, in 408 his behaviour changed dramatically. Crossing the Danube with a force of Huns and Sciri, he seized Castra Martis in Dacia Ripensis and made extravagant demands: 'He [pointed] to the sun, and [declared] that it would be easy

1. Fourth-century Burgundians: e.g. J. F. Matthews, *The Roman Empire of Ammianus* (London, 1989), pp. 306 ff. On their subsequent movements: e.g. Demougeot, *Les invasions barbares*, pp. 432, 491-3; Altheim, *Attila*, p. 89. Cf. Matthews, *Western Aristocracies*, p. 313 n.; some difficulty is caused by the confused report of Olympiodorus, ed. Blockley, fr. 18.

into Gaul. The largest would seem to have been contingents of Vandals, Alans, and so-called Suevi.<sup>1</sup> No precise figures are given, but we are again dealing with a substantial phenomenon. The Vandals (in separate groups of Hasdings and Silings) and Suevi survived numerous battles, and, in the coming years, carved out kingdoms for themselves within the western Empire.<sup>2</sup> The Alans were divided into a number of groups, but clearly numerous. Even though some stayed in Gaul, those who made their way to Spain are said by Hydatius to have outnumbered the Vandals and Suevi before they suffered severe losses in the late 410s.<sup>3</sup> Many, if not all, of this second set of invaders originated, like Radagaisus' force, west of the Carpathians. The best geographical fix we have is for the Vandals, who, in winter 401–2, raided Raetia: at that point, therefore, they were located somewhere in the middle or upper Danubian region (cf. Map 2). Before then, they had probably lived rather more to the north-east, but still west of the Carpathians.<sup>4</sup> Of the others, we have no precise information on the Alans, although, as we have seen, they had been displaced since c. 370 by Hunnic activity from their old homes close to the river Don; but the Suevi probably inhabited regions north of the middle and upper Danube opposite Pannonia, Raetia, and Noricum – again west of the Carpathians.<sup>5</sup> The participation of some smaller groups – Sarmatians and hostile Roman Pannonian provincials (*hostes Pannonii*) – mentioned only by Jerome, is similarly consistent with the turmoil having affected primarily this region.<sup>6</sup>

1. Vandals and Alans are well known, but the Suevi pose a problem. They are well attested in the first century, but no fourth-century source mentions them. However, Alamanni and Suevi were later interchangeable: Walafrid Strabo, ed. B. Krusch, *Vita s. Galli*, prologus (MGH, s.r. Merov., vol. iv, Berlin, 1902), pp. 281–2; both Alamanni and Quadi (a subgroup of the first-century Suevi) are mentioned by Jerome as participating in the Rhine crossing: *Ep.* 123. 15, CSEL, lvi. 92; and fifth-century Suevi inhabited the region held by Quadi in the fourth: see *infra*, n. 5. The Suevi of Spain, therefore, were probably composed of groups of Quadi and Alamanni from the area of the first-century coalition (together perhaps with Marcomanni: see *supra*, p. 9, n. 6); cf. Wolfram, *History of the Goths*, p. 387, n. 55. For a different view, see E. A. Thompson, 'Hydatius and the Invasion of Spain', in his *Romans and Barbarians* (Wisconsin, 1982), 137–60, at 152–3.

2. For fair criticism of traditional accounts of Vandal numbers: W. Goffart, *Barbarians and Romans, AD 418–584: The Techniques of Accommodation* (Princeton, 1980), App. A. His arguments do not deny that the Vandals were numerous.

3. For references, see *infra*, p. 15, n. 4. Aside from the Alans who crossed to Spain and were led c. 418 by Addax (*PLRE*, ii. 8), we know also of the groups of Goar and Respendial in Gaul in c. 410 (*ibid.* 514–15 and 940 respectively), together with several groups subsequently in Roman service there, who may or may not have all come from these two groups; cf. B. S. Bachrach, *The Alans in the West* (Minneapolis, 1973), pp. 37 ff., 51 ff.

4. Claudian, *De Bell. Goth.*, 11. 363 ff. (cf. 414–15); cf. C. Courtois, *Les Vandales et l'Afrique* (Paris, 1955), pp. 38 ff.

5. Quadi: L. F. Pitts, 'Relations between Rome and the German "Kings" on the Middle Danube in the First to Fourth Centuries AD', *JRS*, lxxix (1989), 45–58. Alamanni lived west of the Quadi between the upper Rhine and Danube. Fifth-century Suevi still lived on the Danube: W. Pohl, 'Die Gepiden und die Gentes an der mittleren Donau nach dem Zerfall des Attilareiches', in *Die Völker an der mittleren und unteren Donau im fünften und sechsten Jahrhundert*, ed. H. Wolfram and F. Daim (Denkschriften der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, phil.-hist. Kl. cxlv, Vienna, 1980), pp. 239–305, at 274–6.

6. Jerome, *Ep.* 123. 15, CSEL, lvi. 92. Fourth-century Sarmatians: AM, 17. 12–13 (Sarmatians who did not participate in 406 continued to live on the Danube: Pohl, 'Die Gepiden', pp. 276–7).

for him, if he so desired, to subjugate every region of the earth that is enlightened by that luminary.' Uldin has thus sometimes been considered a potential conqueror on the scale of Attila. Despite the rhetoric, however, the east Romans swiftly defused the threat. A group of Uldin's followers was detached by diplomacy, and the Roman army then killed and captured many of the now fleeing enemy. The course of events thus makes Uldin's rhetoric look more like a bluff than the calculated arrogance of a true precursor of Attila.<sup>1</sup>

These three invasions – Radagaisus, the Rhine crossings, and Uldin – are in themselves separate events, with different tribal groups attacking different parts of the Empire. Taken together, however, they add up to a convulsion affecting virtually the whole of Rome's European frontier in a decidedly short space of time. In the course of it, certainly tens of thousands and very probably hundreds of thousands crossed into the Roman Empire.<sup>2</sup> Why? Uldin's ostensible motive was conquest, and his boasts as recorded in the sources have largely been taken at face value, but the course of events suggests that he can have had little realistic hope of achieving much by force. The ease with which he was defeated, indeed, underlines an important point. Far from offering easy pickings, imperial forces in c. AD 400 still had such a logistical, technological, and tactical superiority over so-called barbarians that the Roman Empire was an extremely dangerous place to invade. Apart from the battle of Hadrianople itself, which was clearly some kind of fluke, the pages of Ammianus are to a large extent the record of one Roman victory after another, particularly on the Rhine frontier.<sup>3</sup> The fate of the other invaders reinforces the point. Radagaisus, as we have seen, was defeated and executed outside Florence. Likewise, although the Vandals and Suevi eventually established kingdoms, this was not without heavy losses once they had crossed the Pyrenees into Spain. One Vandal group – the Silings – was destroyed in Baetica in the 410s by a combined Romano-Gothic force, and the Alans occupying Lusitania suffered such casualties at the same hands that, after the death of King Addax, they joined up with the Hasding Vandals.<sup>4</sup>

1. Sozomen, *HE*, 9. 25. 1–7; cf. *C. Tb.*, 5. 6. 2. Big-talking nomads seem to have been common; some Avar examples: Menander Protector, ed. and trans. R. C. Blockley (Liverpool, 1985), fr. 19. 1; *Chronicon Paschale*, ed. Bonn, p. 721. Thompson, *Attila and the Huns*, p. 60, is clear that Uldin was 'a relatively minor figure'. For an alternative view, Maenchen-Helfen, *World of the Huns*, pp. 59–72, esp. 71. Altheim, *Attila*, p. 84, sees rule descending in a fairly direct line from Uldin to Rua (Attila's uncle), but it is highly unlikely that Uldin's kingdom survived his heavy defeat; cf. Maenchen-Helfen, *World of the Huns*, p. 71.

2. Tens of thousands of armed men were involved, and their ratio to total population is normally reckoned at c. 1:5.

3. Apart from Hadrianople, substantially the same group of Goths (or their descendants) encountered Roman armies in five other set-piece battles inside thirty years. Each was a draw: Heather, *Goths and Romans*, p. 178.

4. Hydatius, 60, 63, 68, *CM*, ii. 19, cf. Map 3; Courtois, *Les Vandales*, pp. 53 ff.

I have tried so far to establish two points about these events. First, they add up to a crisis on an enormous scale. Second, there was no obvious reason why the Roman Empire should suddenly have been perceived – by neighbours the entire length of Rhine and Danube – to be on the point of collapse; the reverses inflicted upon the invaders show that it was not. These perspectives prompt two further hypotheses. First, the obvious dangers faced by the invaders, and to which many of them actually succumbed, would suggest that the invasions were not entirely voluntary, and that, as in 376, the invaders faced some pressure to abandon their former homes. Second, the likeliest root cause of this pressure was further movement on the part of the Huns.

It has of course been suggested many times before that the Huns prompted the Rhine crossing of 406.<sup>1</sup> No explicit confirmation exists in any surviving source, however, and some scholars – especially, in recent years, Walter Goffart – have resisted the assumption that all tribes invading the Roman Empire were prompted by pressure from other tribes to their rear.<sup>2</sup> The one contemporary source likely to have explained the full background of these incursions – the history of Olym-piodorus – has survived only in fragments, and, as we have seen, Zosimus made a particular mess of the sections which would have dealt with these events (*supra*, page 12). In two important ways, the arguments developed here greatly strengthen the case for pinning responsibility for 406 upon the Huns. First, by putting the Rhine crossing into its proper chronological and geographical relationship with the invasions of Radagaisus and Uldin, a much clearer sense of the scale of the crisis has emerged. Second, and more important, the picture built up of the chronology of the Huns' advance into Europe makes it much more comprehensible why a second, but linked, crisis should have affected Europe west of the Carpathians some thirty years after the first trouble in the Ukraine. The mass of the Huns had not arrived on the Danube in 376, nor yet in 395; at that date, as we have seen, they were still established considerably to the east, probably somewhere around the Volga and Don. By the 420s, however, they were definitely occupying middle Danubian regions west of the Carpathians.

In 427, for instance, the Romans expelled some of the Huns from Pannonia, the richest Roman province south of the middle Danube (Map 2).<sup>3</sup> And although henceforth operating north of the river (at least

1. E.g. F. Lot, *Les Invasions germaniques: la pénétration mutuelle du monde barbare et du monde romain* (Paris, 1939), pp. 78–9; Thompson, *Attila and the Huns*, p. 28 (qualified with 'it seems'); Courtois, *Les Vandales*, pp. 39–40; Musset, *Les Invasions: les vagues germaniques* (Paris, 1965), pp. 103–4; H.-J. Diesner, *Die Völkerwanderung* (Leipzig, 1976), pp. 126–7; Demougeot, *Les invasions barbares*, p. 415; Altheim, *Attila*, p. 82.

2. Goffart, *Barbarians and Romans*, pp. 2 ff., esp. 16–17; cf. Maenchen-Helfen, *World of the Huns*, pp. 60–1, 71–2.

3. Marcellinus Comes, s.a. 427, *CM*, ii. 76; cf. Jordanes, *Getica*, 32. 166. Many theories have been built on these passages because Marcellinus reports that Pannonia was reoccupied after fifty years, but

for the next decade or so), they continued to base themselves in this region. Thus, when in need of their help, the Roman general Aetius travelled 'through Pannonia' to the Huns in 432, his route showing that the latter had remained west of the Carpathians. Some seven years earlier, Aetius had already recruited similar Hunnic help, which had probably also come from the same place.<sup>1</sup> Likewise, Hunnic royal tombs were, by the early 440s, to be found near the city of Margus (on the opposite bank of the Danube) and hence again west of the Carpathians, and Attila's main base in the 440s was situated on the middle Danubian plain.<sup>2</sup> Somewhere between 395 and 425, then, the main body of the Huns established itself west of the Carpathians. And given the dramatic effects of their arrival just on the fringes of Europe in 376 (i.e. the Goths' appearance on the banks of the Danube together with the incursions of Sarmatians, Alans, and Taifali), we really should expect any subsequent advance to have caused similar convulsions further west.

Whether that advance took place precisely in the period 405–8 is unfortunately less clear. Olympiodorus, once again, is the only historian likely to have provided this essential information, and little has survived of his work apart from its account of events preceding the Gothic sack of Rome in 410.<sup>3</sup> All we have, therefore, are a few tantalizing pieces of evidence, some of which suggest that the Huns were moving or had moved west at around this time. In 409, first of all, the imminent arrival in Italy of ten thousand Hunnic allies offered the Emperor Honorius sufficient hope to continue the struggle against the Goths (Zosimus 5. 50. 1). This incident postdates the defeat of Uldin, who had previously supplied auxiliaries, suggesting that other Huns must in the mean time have arrived within the western Empire's orbit.<sup>4</sup> A second relevant incident occurred in 412–13, when the historian Olympiodorus and his parrot went on an embassy to the Huns. Part of the journey consisted of a difficult sea crossing, during which his ship put in at Athens. It has sometimes been argued that Olympiodorus worked for the western Empire, but a variety of indications show that it must have been the

this is obviously a reference to the start of the upheavals caused by the Huns: Maenchen-Helfen, *World of the Huns*, pp. 78–9. Theophanes, *AM* 5931, ed. C. de Boor (Leipzig, 1883–5), recording the resettlement in Thrace of Pannonian Goths detached from a Hunnic alliance in either 421 or 427, may throw further light upon events. B. Croke, 'Evidence for the Hun Invasion of Thrace in AD 422', *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies*, xviii (1977), 347–67, at 359–61, would date it 421/2, but I suspect 427: Heather, *Goths and Romans*, p. 262. The construct of L. Varady, *Das letzte Jahrhundert Pannoniens: 376–476* (Amsterdam, 1969), pp. 278 ff. (followed, e.g., by Demougeot, *Les invasions barbares*, p. 516) is very misleading: Heather, *Goths and Romans*, App. B, esp. p. 344, n. 31 with refs.

1. References as *PLRE*, ii. 22–4.

2. Royal tombs: Priscus, ed. Blockley, fr. 6. 1. On Attila's camp: R. Browning, 'Where was Attila's Camp?', *Journal of Hellenic Studies*, lxxiii (1953), 143–5.

3. J. F. Matthews, 'Olympiodorus of Thebes and the History of the West (AD 407–425)', *JRS*, lx (1970), 79–97, at 79–89 (repr. in his *Political Life and Culture in Late Roman Society* [London, 1985]).

4. Uldin: Orosius, 7. 37. 12; cf. Marcellinus Comes, s.a. 406, *CM*, ii. 69; Jordanes, *Romana*, 321. Cf. *supra*, p. 15, n. 1; it is unlikely that Uldin survived his defeat. If we associate Basich and Kurich (*supra*, p. 8, n. 1) with the raid of 395, they might be identified with Honorius' new Hunnic allies, since they 'later' went to Rome to make an alliance: Priscus, ed. Blockley, fr. 11. 2, pp. 276–8.

eastern. The most natural conclusion is that Olympiodorus was travelling from Constantinople to the Huns, and, since his route went via Athens, was probably looking to sail through the Aegean and up the Adriatic, whose main port was Aquileia at its head. Olympiodorus' Huns, therefore, are most likely to have been inhabiting some part of the middle Danubian plain, which was highly accessible from this port (cf. Map 2).<sup>1</sup>

It is also very striking that, at more or less the same time, the authorities in Constantinople perceived a substantially aggravated threat to their European possessions in the Balkans. A programme was put in place to strengthen the Danubian fleets (in both the middle and lower regions of the river) in January 412, and the great land walls of the capital itself were erected in the following year. These have sometimes been taken as a response to Uldin's attacks of 408–9, but, in that case, they would be strangely belated; and in all likelihood, as we have seen, Uldin had anyway suffered a crushing defeat. It is very tempting, therefore, to associate these measures with the closer proximity of the main Hunnic threat.<sup>2</sup> A final piece of evidence involves the early life of the general Aetius. After three years with Alaric (probably 405–8), Aetius was then sent as hostage to the Huns. Although it is a fair guess that this occurred about 410, and was associated with Honorius' Hunnic alliance (*supra*, page 17), we are unfortunately not told where he was sent.<sup>3</sup> The western government is arguably more likely to have sent a hostage to the middle Danube than to areas much further east.

Evidence for Huns *en masse* along the middle Danube is thus scrappy, if collectively suggestive, for the 410s; but for the 420s it becomes solid enough, and this suffices to establish the main point. For present purposes, it actually matters little whether it was direct or indirect Hunnic pressure which provoked the crisis of 405–8: in other words, whether the mass of the Huns arrived west of the Carpathians immediately afterwards, or a little later (i.e. by the 420s). It was, as we have seen, only some years after the two Gothic groups abandoned their homes in 376 that Huns in large numbers even got as far as the lower Danube (c. 400, *supra*, page 10). When we find that the Huns' later appearance west of these mountains was similarly preceded by a huge convulsion among the tribal groups of that region, it seems only reasonable, in this instance at least, to turn chronology into causation and conclude that similar pro-

1. On Olympiodorus' affiliations: Matthews, 'Olympiodorus'. The sea journey: ed. Blockley, *frt.* 19 and 28, both surely referring to the same crossing; cf. Croke, 'Hun Invasion', 353. I agree, therefore, with Maenchen-Helfen, *World of the Huns*, p. 74, on the destination, if not the route; cf. Varady, *Das letzte Jahrhundert*, pp. 223–4. Others have envisaged Olympiodorus visiting the Pontus: Thompson, *Attila*, p. 34; Demougeot, *Les invasions barbares*, pp. 391–2.

2. Danubian fleets: C. *Th.*, 7. 17. 1 (cf. 7. 16. 2). Walls: C. Mango, *Le développement urbain de Constantinople (IVe–VIIe siècles)* (Paris, 1990), pp. 46 ff. Response to Uldin: Thompson, *Attila*, pp. 29–39; Demougeot, *Les invasions barbares*, p. 391.

3. References as *PLRE*, ii. 22. The date has often been discussed, with some consensus that the Hunnic hostageship was 408/9–411/12: G. Zecchini, *Aetius: l'ultima difesa dell'Occidente romano* (Rome, 1983), pp. 117 ff., with refs.

cesses were at work in both cases. In all likelihood, therefore, the large-scale penetrations of the Roman frontier in 376 and 405–8 represent two phases of the same crisis, both prompted by the westward progression of the Huns in stages, from the outer fringes to the very heart of Europe.<sup>1</sup>

A fuller understanding of the emergence of Hunnic power, an important subject in its own right, also brings more clearly into focus the fundamental role played by the Huns in creating the political conditions which led inexorably to the deposition of Romulus Augustulus in 476. By c. 410, as we have seen, Goths, Vandals, Alans, and Suevi (amongst others) had made their way into the western Roman Empire directly as a result of the insecurity generated by the Huns beyond Rome's frontiers. Immigration, even large-scale immigration, was not at all a new phenomenon; the Empire had a long history of resettling immigrants within its borders.<sup>2</sup> Up to the 370s, however, this was done on Roman terms, or else resisted. In the 350s, for instance, the Emperor Julian only pretended to be willing to treat with some Salian Franks who had taken possession of Roman territory, to put them off their guard. He then followed up with the army and dealt with them as he pleased.<sup>3</sup> The traditional policy towards immigrants, indeed, was thorough military and political subjugation followed by widely dispersed settlement in small groups, an approach obviously designed to minimize any security risk.<sup>4</sup>

Such policies were not abandoned in the Hunnic era for want of trying. In 376, only one of the two Gothic groups which crossed the Danube unsubdued – the Tervingi – did so with Roman permission, and then only because Roman forces were tied up on the Persian front. And even those Goths allowed to cross were then subject to general harassment and an attempt (again following standard Roman practice) to assassinate or kidnap their leaders at a banquet given by the local Roman commander. The Empire made a full peace with both groups only in October 382 after six years of warfare, during which several Gothic subgroups had been wiped out, and, until the heavy defeat at Hadrianople in 378, where the Emperor Valens and two-thirds of his army fell on a single afternoon, imperial policy had been directed precisely to reversing the temporary asylum granted some Goths out of necessity in 376. Even after 382, the Empire was probably still looking to undermine the Gothic autonomy which it ostensibly tolerated.<sup>5</sup> Nor did this one enforced modification lead to a more general change in policy. As we

1. Although I in general accept Goffart's warnings, *Barbarians and Romans*, pp. 15–16.

2. G. E. M. de Ste. Croix, *The Class Struggle in the Ancient Greek World* (London, 1981), App. 3, pp. 509–18, collects the evidence.

3. AM, 17. 8. 3–5; cf. 19. 11. 6–16, for the similar fate of some Sarmatians in 359.

4. Heather, *Goths and Romans*, pp. 123–4, 128 ff.; cf. W. Goffart, 'Rome, Constantinople, and the Barbarians', *AHR*, lxxvi (1981), 275–306, at 280–1.

5. Heather, *Goths and Romans*, pp. 128–35, 165–75.



have seen, Odotheus received short shrift in 386, and the Roman state responded aggressively to the crisis of 405–8. Radagaisus was killed and his followers dispersed; so many were sold as slaves that the bottom fell out of the market (Orosius 7. 37. 13 ff.). No concessions were made to Uldin, and many of the Sciri who followed him were again turned into slaves or individual tenant-farmers parcelled out to Roman landowners. Likewise, when an effective response to the Rhine crossing did eventually emerge, one of the two Vandal groups which, together with the Alans, crossed the Pyrenees ceased to exist as an independent unit. In subsequent years, many Suevi similarly fell by the wayside.<sup>1</sup>

If there were no obvious outside factor, we might look for some internal, perhaps ideologically-driven, shift in Roman policy to explain the large and unsubdued immigrations of the period c. 376–410. But, as we have seen, that policy changed only partially and under duress, and probably all the immigrants were attempting to escape the insecurity generated by the Huns.<sup>2</sup> In short, there is every reason to think that the spread of Hunnic power into Europe over perhaps two generations (fifty years or so) fundamentally altered the prevailing strategic balance of power, forcing the Roman Empire to adopt new policies towards some of the groups which crossed the frontier. To characterize this mass influx and its consequences as 'an imaginative experiment that got a little out of hand'<sup>3</sup> is to ignore the determination with which the Empire attempted to resist the invaders; there were forces at work here beyond imperial control.<sup>4</sup> At first, the immigrants operated within a political and ideological framework which accepted the existence of the Empire. The Goths Alaric and Athaulf, for instance, wanted Roman commands and dignities, and Athaulf married himself into the imperial family (Galla Placidia, sister of Honorius), producing a short-lived son with a real claim to the western throne. This type of behaviour was replicated among the other immigrants, none of whom attempted to carve out their own entirely independent states.<sup>5</sup> Its importance, however, should not

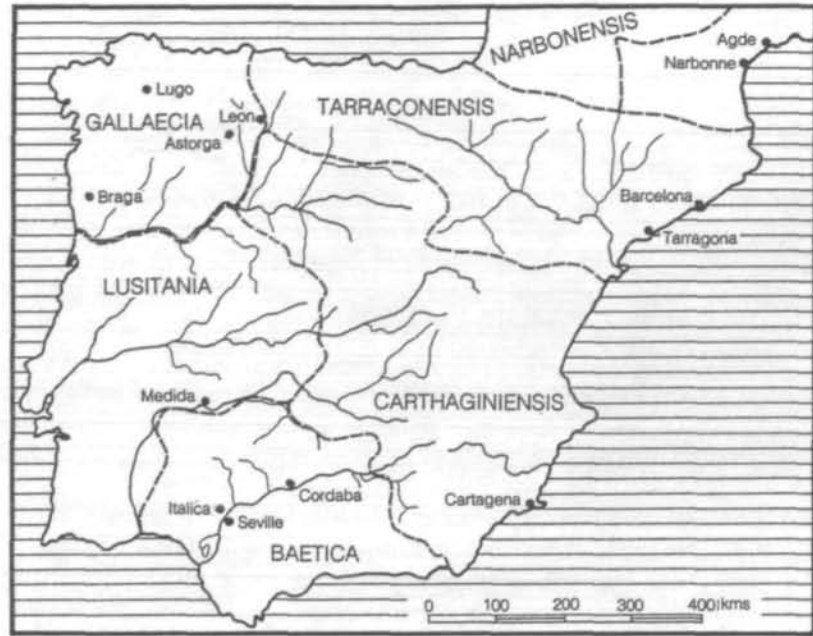
1. Sciri: C. Th., 5. 6. 2. Vandals and Alans: *supra*, p. 15, n. 4. Suevi: E. A. Thompson, 'The Suevic Kingdom of Galicia', in his *Romans and Barbarians*, pp. 161–87, at 161–5.

2. Cf. Goffart, 'Rome, Constantinople, and the Barbarians', 277–8; there was no active conspiracy among the invaders, but the Huns thus provided a significant degree of constrained unity.

3. Goffart, *Barbarians and Romans*, p. 35.

4. Goffart, 'Rome, Constantinople, and the Barbarians', 292–5, argues that immigrants were now welcome within the Empire, because the east wanted to settle them in the west to reduce the dangers posed by usurpers. Theodosius did use Goths against the western usurpers Maximus and Eugenius, but once they were established on Roman soil, he had no choice; the alternative would have been to leave a large independent force near his capital behind his main armies; cf. Pacatus, *Pan. Lat.*, ed. and Fr. trans. E. Galletier (Paris, 1949–55), 12 [2]. 32. 3 (pointing this out explicitly in relation to Gothic participation in the Maximus campaign). The western barbarian settlements were also made by western not eastern regimes, the east even trying to help the west defeat the immigrants (*infra*, p. 25). The argument likewise fails to note how partially and grudgingly imperial policy changed.

5. Cf. Athaulf's famous remark that he had first thought to replace *Romania* with *Gothia*, but then decided to use Gothic military power to sustain the Empire: Orosius, 7. 43. 2–3. On the ambitions of Alaric and Athaulf, see Heather, *Goths and Romans*, pp. 215–17, 219–24. Similarly, Burgundians and Alans supported the usurpation of Jovinus (*infra*, p. 23), and the Vandal Gunderic seems to have raised Maximus in Spain (*PLRE*, ii. 745).



Map 3: The Roman Provinces of Spain, c. 400

surprisingly quickly. In Gaul in the early 410s, for instance, Athaulf attracted considerable support from local landowning elites, who saw good relations with the newly arrived, but militarily powerful Goths as the best means, in changed circumstances, of preserving the essential fabric of their lives: above all, their property.<sup>1</sup> An alternative response to the same problem, and equally damaging to the interests of the imperial centre, pursued particularly in Britain and Armorica, was self-assertion, whereby more martial local elites took responsibility for their own defence.<sup>2</sup> In pushing various groups across the Roman frontier, then, the Huns not only provoked an immediate military crisis for the Roman state, but posed for it more long-term political problems. A facade of *Romanitas* rendered the immigrant groups no less insistent on their own interests, and this determined self-assertion had the very damaging

1. The best illustration of the fundamental importance of secure property is Priscus, ed. Blockley, fr. 11. 2, pp. 72, 104–7. On changes of loyalty and their motivation in a Gallic context: P. J. Heather, 'The Emergence of the Visigothic Kingdom', in *Fifth Century Gaul: A Crisis of Identity*, ed. J. Drinkwater and H. Elton (Cambridge, 1992), pp. 84–94; R. W. Mathisen, *Roman Aristocrats in Barbarian Gaul: Strategies for Survival in an Age of Transition* (Texas, 1993), chs. 11–12.

2. I. N. Wood, 'The End of Roman Britain: Continental Evidence and Parallels', in *Gildas: New Approaches*, ed. M. Lapidge and D. Dumville (Woodbridge, 1984), pp. 1–25; R. Van Dam, *Leadership and Community in Late Antique Gaul* (Berkeley, 1985), pt. 1; G. Halsall, 'The Origins of the Reibengraberzivilisation: Forty Years On', in *Fifth Century Gaul*, ed. Drinkwater and Elton, pp. 196–207.

be overestimated, since ostensible respect for 'Roman-ness' – *Romanitas* – did not prevent the immigrants from looking to extend their own particular niche at every available opportunity. Every moment of political discontinuity at the centre in the 420s and 430s thus saw Goths, Burgundians, Franks, Vandals, and Suevi take the field.<sup>1</sup>

These attempted expansions directly threatened the Empire's survival. If we reduce the matter to basics, the Roman state taxed the agricultural production of its dependent territories to pay for a powerful army and a political-cum-administrative establishment.<sup>2</sup> Any loss of territory due to permanent annexation or temporary damage in warfare thus meant loss of revenue and a weakening of the state machine. The pragmatic realization on the part of immigrant leaders that, in the early fifth century, the Roman state was still the most powerful of its day, and hence demanded some show of deference, did not make them any less assertive of independent political interests, nor those interests any less inimical to the state.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, any weakening of the Roman state (permanent or temporary) had the more insidious effect of breaking down ties between local Roman elites and the imperial centre. Reduced to basic terms again, the late Roman elite consisted of a geographically widespread class of local landowners, who, at the same time, participated in imperial institutions because the state offered protection and legitimation of their position at home, and, via imperial careers, substantial additional opportunities for making money. This extra wealth, together with the lifelong rights and privileges which were also part and parcel of an imperial career, further strengthened the landowners' position within their local societies.<sup>4</sup>

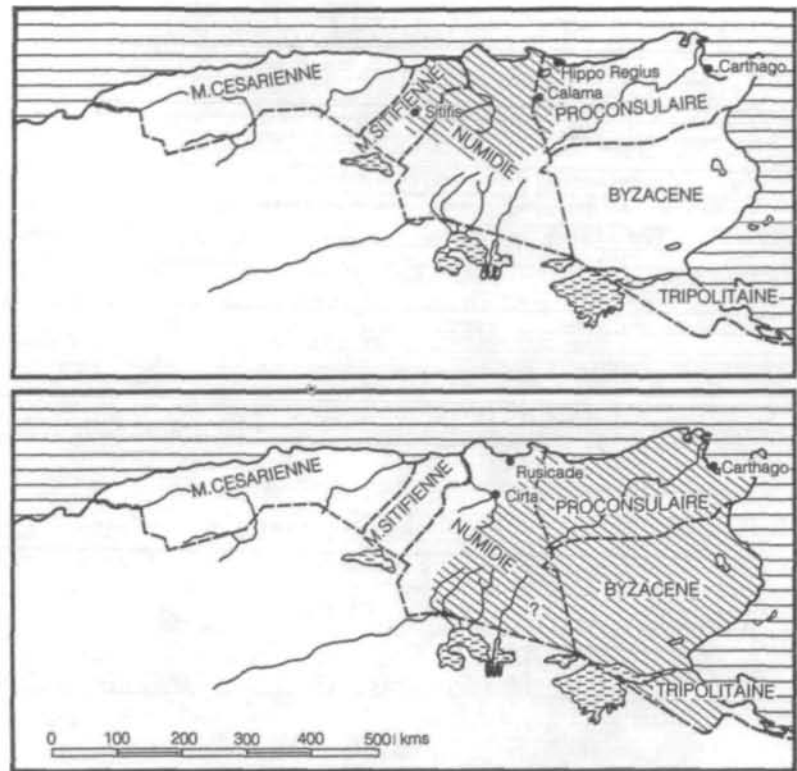
If, because of the appearance of new military forces, the Roman state was no longer capable of sustaining local elites in this fashion (and hence of constraining their loyalties either), the whole point of attachment to the Empire disappeared. As a result, they naturally tended in such circumstances to look elsewhere for props to their position, notably to whichever barbarian immigrant group was currently most powerful in their own locality. In practice, such switches of loyalty could happen

1. E.g. the Goths revolted in 422, 425, 430, and 436–9. There were numerous Frankish revolts (*infra*, p. 23, n. 2), and the Vandals exploited the quarrels of Aetius, Boniface, and Felix (*infra*, p. 23) to invade Africa.

2. On its workings: A. H. M. Jones, *The Later Roman Empire, 284–602: A Social, Economic and Administrative Survey* (Oxford, 1964), ch. 13. Structural importance: C. Wickham, 'That Other Transition: From the Ancient World to Feudalism', *Past and Present*, ciii (1984), 3–36.

3. The lack of barbarian cultural assertiveness is thus beside the point. For a different view, see Goffart, 'Rome, Constantinople, and the Barbarians', 295 ff.; id., 'The Theme of "The Barbarian Invasions" in Late Antique and Modern Historiography', in *Das Reich und die Barbaren*, ed. E. K. Chrysos and A. Schwarcz (Vienna, 1989), pp. 87–107, at 93 ff.

4. By the fourth century, all were Roman citizens. On the dual nature of careers, see Matthews, *Western Aristocracies*, ch. 1 and *passim*; P. J. Heather, 'New Men for New Constantines: Creating an Imperial Governing Class in the Eastern Mediterranean', in *New Constantines: The Rhythm of Imperial Renewal in Byzantium, 413–1313 Centuries*, ed. P. Magdalino (Aldershot, 1994), pp. 11–33, at 25 ff. This class was marked out above all by its education: R. A. Kaster, *Guardians of the Language: The Grammarians and Society in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley, 1988), pp. 12 ff.



Map 4: *The Vandal Partitions of Africa*  
(after R. Courtois, *Les Vandales*)

underlying problem – had been dealt with. And from the early 420s, further political crises at the centre gave free rein to these centrifugal forces. Constantius' death in 421, followed by that of the Emperor Honorius in 424, set loose a struggle for power which was not resolved until 433. An eastern army secured the throne for Honorius' nephew (and Constantius' son), Valentinian III, in 425, but a three-way power struggle was then fought out between the commanders of the main western army groups (Valentinian was only six in 425). By a combination of assassination, battle, and luck, Aetius – originally the Gallic commander – won out over Felix, commander in Italy, and Boniface (succeeded briefly by his son Sebastianus), commander in Africa.<sup>1</sup>

With political unity finally restored, Aetius could now deal with the immigrant groups who had in the meantime been exploiting the power vacuum. His main successes came in Gaul, where the Goths (who had

1. Matthews, *Western Aristocracies*, ch. 15, on the usurpation. For Aetius, Felix and Boniface, references as *PLRE*, ii. 23–4, 238–40, 463–4; secondary accounts: Th. Mommsen, 'Aetius', *Hermes*, lxxvi (1901), 516–47, at 520–3; Stein, *Bas Empire*, pp. 317–19; Zecchini, *Aetio*, ch. 6; O'Flynn, *Generalissimos*, pp. 74 ff.

effect of making the immigrants and their leaders loom larger than the central Roman state in the minds of local Roman elites. In what follows I will attempt to demonstrate that the disintegration of the west Roman state was a direct political consequence of the immigrations prompted by the Huns.

By c. 410, not only were Vandals, Alans, and Suevi running free in Spain, but a series of usurpers had been thrown up in Britain in response to the incursions. The failure to deal with these problems had destroyed the regime of Stilicho, and Stilicho's fall had brought the Goths of Alaric from the Balkans to Italy.<sup>1</sup> The resulting power vacuum in the west led the Romano-British to assert total independence (Zosimus 6. 5. 2–3), and allowed Anglo-Saxons and Franks to extend their activities across the frontier.<sup>2</sup> Nonetheless, the next thirty years did see periods of political reconstruction, especially under Fl. Constantius in the 410s and Fl. Aetius in the 430s.

Constantius, senior western general (*Magister Militum*) from 410/11,<sup>3</sup> first restored unity to the Empire by dealing with the usurpers. In 411, the related rebellions of Constantine III and Gerontius were defeated,<sup>4</sup> successes followed in 413 by the defeats of Jovinus in Gaul and Heraclianus in Italy.<sup>5</sup> Next, he brought to heel the Goths, who had in the meantime been sponsoring their own usurpation. A partial agreement was reached with them as early as 413, when they were used against Jovinus, but only in 416 did they finally accept a treaty which curbed some of their ambitions for a central role in imperial politics.<sup>6</sup> Constantius then used a combined force of Romans and Goths in Spain against the invaders of 406; the Siling Vandals and Alans were both neutralized by 418, when the campaign was halted, perhaps to settle the Goths in Aquitaine.<sup>7</sup>

By 420, then, Constantius had substantially reconstructed the western Empire, but only some of the autonomous immigrant groups – the

1. See generally Matthews, *Western Aristocracies*, pp. 270 ff.; Heather, *Goths and Romans*, pp. 208 ff. Alaric was joined by the survivors of Radagaisus' force: *ibid.*, pp. 213–14.

2. Britain: Wood, 'The End of Roman Britain'. The Franks first resisted the invaders (Gregory of Tours, *Historiae*, 2. 9), then exploited the chaos for gain; there are reports of conflicts between the Franks and the Empire in 413, 420, and 428: E. James, *The Franks* (Oxford, 1988), p. 54.

3. Date: *PLRE*, ii. 322. See generally E. Stein, *Histoire du Bas Empire*, vol. i, ed. and trans. J.-R. Palanque (Paris, 1959), pp. 262–71; J. M. O'Flynn, *Generalissimos of the Western Roman Empire* (Albany, 1983), pp. 63 ff.

4. Constantine was the most successful of the British usurpers (*infra*, p. 25). Gerontius was his general in Spain, but rebelled, proclaiming Maximus emperor: Matthews, *Western Aristocracies*, pp. 333–34; *ibid.*, pp. 313–15. Heraclianus: Orosius, 7. 42. 12–14; cf. S. I. Oost, 'The Revolt of Heraclian', *Classical Philology*, lxi (1966), 236–42.

5. Heather, *Goths and Romans*, pp. 219–22 with refs.

6. References as *supra*, p. 15, n. 4. It is usually supposed that the Goths were to be used against some Gallic enemy: Wolfram, *History of the Goths*, pp. 173 ff. with refs. But before 422 the Goths were back in Spain fighting the invaders of 406 once again: Hydatius, 77, *CM*, ii. 20. The Goths were seemingly awarded actual land in 418 (cf. Heather, *Goths and Romans*, pp. 221–2; *infra*, p. 33, n. 2), and a process of land allocation will have been lengthy.

revolted in 425, 430, and 436) were pacified by 439, along with Frankish groups (among whom unrest broke out in 428 and 432), and Alamanni (who had raided across the frontier in 430–1). Local separatist groups in Armorica – so-called Bagaudae – were also defeated, and successful campaigns fought against Burgundians in 436–7.<sup>1</sup> Elsewhere, the Vandals had taken advantage of the chaos to cross to North Africa in 429, where responsibility for dealing with them was assumed by the eastern Empire, one of whose leading generals, Aspar, took command in Carthage between 431 and 434. The subsequent balance of power was enshrined in the treaty of 435, which ceded the Vandals land in two poorer North African provinces: Mauretania and eastern Numidia (Map 4).<sup>2</sup> In Spain, less direct action was taken. Some locals, notably the chronicler-bishop Hydatius, sought Aetius' help, but it seems to have come mainly in the form of diplomatic pressure rather than extra soldiers. A political accommodation soon followed between the Suevi and the natives of Gallaecia.<sup>3</sup>

Like Constantius, then, Aetius put much effort into halting the political fragmentation of the Empire.<sup>4</sup> Strikingly, both concentrated on defeating Roman rivals before tackling the barbarian threat, which might seem a wrong order of priorities. But political crisis does not suspend personal ambition (in fact, it often gives rivalry an extra point), and to combat the grave threats now facing the Empire, any leader needed to deploy the full range of imperial resources – particularly, of course, on the military front. Constantius' defeat of the usurpers reunited the armies of the western Empire (the British, Gallic and Spanish elements of which had been won over by Constantine and Gerontius<sup>5</sup>), and Aetius' defeat of his rivals had a similar effect. Both also drew on support from outside the western Empire, most obviously from Constantinople. The eastern Empire sent considerable help to Honorius when Alaric was ravaging Italy in c. 410 (Zosimus 6. 8. 2–3), secured the throne for Valentinian III, and, via Aspar, attempted to deal with the

1. References as *PLRE*, ii. 24–5. Secondary accounts: Mommsen, 'Aetius', 523; Stein, *Bas Empire*, pp. 322 ff.; O'Flynn, *Generalissimos*, pp. 89–90; Zecchini, *Aetio*, ch. 9.

2. Sources: *PLRE*, ii. 166; cf. Courtois, *Les Vandales*, pp. 155–71.

3. Merobaudes claims military success (*Pan.*, i, ed. & trans. F. M. Clover, *Transactions of the American Philological Society*, lxi (1971), fr. ΠΑ 2–3), but Hydatius, 96–113, *CM*, ii. 22–3, records largely diplomatic activity.

4. J. R. Moss, 'The Effects of the Policies of Aetius on the History of Western Europe', *Historia*, xxii (1973), 711–31, argues that Aetius mistakenly concentrated on Gaul instead of North Africa. But southern Gaul was also rich, there were close ties between its landowning classes and those of Italy (*infra*, p. 31, n. 1), and Aetius was responsible to a governing class brought up to expect Roman victory, which probably made abandoning Gaul politically impossible. Besides, the eastern Empire provided help with Africa: *supra*, p. 24, n. 1. Other responses to Moss: Zecchini, *Aetio*, pp. 162 ff., 211; O'Flynn, *Generalissimos*, p. 103, n. 54.

5. Constantine: Sozomen, *HE*, 9. 9; cf. Zosimus, 6. 1. 2. Gerontius: Sozomen, *HE*, 9. 12. Constantine's usurpation unravelled when a plot to hand over the Italian armies to him failed: *ibid.* 9. 12. 5. H. Sivan 'An Unedited Letter of the Emperor Honorius to the Spanish Soldiers', *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik*, lxi (1985), 273–87, dates a pay rise for the Spanish military to the period of peace after 416, but this was probably a measure to conciliate troops who had followed the usurpers and were now to fight barbarians.

Vandals in the early 430s. Given the size of the east's own commitments against Persia and increasingly the Huns, this represents a major investment of resources in preserving dynastic and strategic stability in the west.<sup>1</sup>

Paradoxically, both Constantius (probably) and Aetius (certainly) also drew upon the Huns. In mid-409, as we have seen, Honorius summoned 10,000 Hunnic auxiliaries to his assistance. Since they did not arrive in time to prevent the sack of Rome in August 410, some have concluded that they never appeared.<sup>2</sup> In the campaigning season of 411, however, Constantius was suddenly able to cast off the military paralysis which had gripped Ravenna since the Rhine crossing of 406, marching confidently into Gaul to overpower Constantine III, Gerontius, and the barbarian auxiliaries recruited by Constantine's general Edobichus.<sup>3</sup> Constantius' sudden ability to act might well reflect, therefore, the arrival of the Huns summoned in 409, especially since Alaric's Goths, now led by Athaulf, were still in Italy in 411, so that extra troops are unlikely to have been available from there.<sup>4</sup> If Constantius' Huns can be no more than a plausible conjecture, the importance of Hunnic support for Aetius is not in doubt. For one thing, it was his trump card in internal politics. In 425, after the defeat of the usurper John, under whom Aetius held high office, it was only the fact that the latter arrived with a large Hunnic army which made it necessary for the regime of Valentinian III to grant him a command in Gaul. Likewise in 432, Aetius was actually defeated and forced to flee by Boniface (who was himself mortally wounded), but returned with another large Hunnic force which again secured his position.<sup>5</sup> He used Huns extensively in Gaul too, where they were responsible both for crushing the Armorican Bagaudae, and for much of the campaign against the Visigoths.<sup>6</sup> They also savaged the Burgundians in 437, an event organized – according to some of our sources at least – by Aetius, and which preceded a resettlement of the survivors within the Roman frontier.<sup>7</sup> The Huns played a critical role, therefore, probably in Constantius' and certainly in Aetius' ability to hold in check political fragmentation. There is a nice irony here. Hunnic groups, whose movements had initially caused the upheavals, were subsequently deployed by the Roman state to control the political consequences of their original actions.

1. Demougeot, *De l'unité*, esp. pt. 3, places the decisive split between east and west too early; more balanced is W. Kaegi, *Byzantium and the Decline of Rome* (Princeton, 1968), ch. 1; cf. E. A. Thompson, 'The Foreign Policy of Theodosius II and Marcian', *Hermathena*, lxxvi (1950), 58–78.

2. E.g. Maenchen-Helfen, *World of the Huns*, p. 69.

3. Sozomen, *HE*, 9. 13. 2, 14; cf. Matthews, *Western Aristocracies*, pp. 312–13.

4. If the Huns were summoned late in 409, 411 might have been the first campaigning season for which they could be ready. It has usually been thought that they did turn up: e.g. Thompson, *Attila and the Huns*, p. 34; Demougeot, *De l'unité*, p. 446.

5. References as *PLRE*, ii. 23–4.

6. References as *ibid.* 684–5.

7. References as *ibid.* 523. On Aetius' role: Altheim, *Attila*, p. 119; Stein, *Bas Empire*, p. 323; O'Flynn, *Generalissimos*, p. 89, n. 4.

Whether such combinations of Huns, eastern Empire, and the west's own troops were really sufficient to hold the west together, however, is very doubtful. Constantius and Aetius established balances of power, but every moment of political crisis at the centre threatened their rather rickety structures. Periodic upheavals had always been more or less unavoidable within the late Roman system, which incorporated a large and diffuse upper class vying for control of a powerful governmental machine, with all the opportunities for profit that this offered.<sup>1</sup> In the fourth century, the machine itself had survived such moments largely undamaged, and central control was quickly reasserted over peripheral areas which seized opportunities to break away.<sup>2</sup> Once the Huns had forced unsubdued immigrants across the frontier, however, these crises offered semi- or unassimilated immigrants exciting opportunities for expansion. In the process, the governmental machine itself now suffered harm, since there followed temporary or permanent losses of revenue from areas caught up in warfare, annexed outright by ambitious barbarian kings, or turned independent.

Thus, no more revenues came from Britain after c. 410,<sup>3</sup> Spanish revenues must have been entirely lost for the bulk of the 410s and only partially restored thereafter. Parts of Gallaecia stayed in Suevic hands throughout the fifth century, and the Vandals remained very active (sometimes attacking the Suevi, sometimes pillaging the Hispano-Romans) until they left Spain in 427.<sup>4</sup> It is also most unlikely that much tax was raised in war-torn Gaul in either the 410s or the 430s. Moreover, substantial tax remissions were sometimes granted to areas caught up in the fighting. After the Goths left Italy, Honorius reduced the land tax of the eight Suburbicarian provinces to one-fifth in 413, and, after a further five years, the taxes of Picenum and Tuscia to one-seventh, and those of Campania to one-ninth.<sup>5</sup> Perhaps not surprisingly, taxpayers in those areas which did remain under central control seem to have faced ever increasing burdens.<sup>6</sup>

This already difficult state of affairs was pushed into acute crisis when, in 439, the Vandals marched into Carthage, taking possession of the richest provinces of North Africa.<sup>7</sup> These lands were crucial to the

1. Elite competition and the construction of regimes have been illuminated by J. F. Matthews: esp. *Western Aristocracies*; 'The Letters of Symmachus', in *Latin Literature of the Fourth Century*, ed. J. W. Binns (London, 1974), pp. 58–99; and 'Gallic Supporters of Theodosius', *Latomus*, xxx (1971), 1073–99 (the last two reprinted in Matthews, *Political Life and Culture*).

2. Three military expeditions, for instance, reasserted control in Britain in the late antique period: P. Salway, *Roman Britain* (Oxford, 1981), pp. 306 ff., 356 ff., 375 ff.

3. Cf. *supra*, p. 22; the later appeal to Aetius (Gildas, 20) brought no intervention.

4. E.g. Hydatius, 71, 75, 86, 89–90, *CM*, ii. 20–1; cf. Thompson, 'Suevic Kingdom of Galicia'.

5. *C. Tb.*, 11. 28. 7, 12. After Vandal attacks, the taxes of Sicily were similarly reduced to one-seventh: *N. Val.*, 1. 2 (440). Cf. Jones, *Later Roman Empire*, p. 204; reductions must have been made for war-torn Gaul and Spain.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 464, n. 128, where it is deduced from *N. Val.*, 5. 4, that western tax rates were twice as high in 440 as those in the east even a century later.

7. Courtois, *Les Vandales*, pp. 171 ff.



Empire – not least in feeding the population of Rome – and a huge effort was made to restore the situation. For the campaigning season of 441, a combined force from east and west gathered in Sicily<sup>1</sup> (the Suevi meanwhile took advantage of the Empire's natural preoccupation with North Africa to take control, by 441, of all of Spain except Tarrakonensis<sup>2</sup>). In many ways, this crisis was the acid test of whether Aetius could really hold the line against political fragmentation, or was merely slowing it down. Unfortunately for him, if not for the Vandals, the expedition went no further than Sicily because of a critical change in the stance of the Huns.

Up to about 440, the Huns had occasionally raided both halves of the Empire, but created most difficulty for it by pushing different tribes across the imperial frontier. As we have seen, they had also been happy to help control the political after-effects of the immigrations. In c. 440, however, the Hunnic Empire reached the apotheosis of its power under Attila and (at first) his brother Bleda: the end result, it seems, of related processes of power centralization among the Huns, and conquest of other tribes.<sup>3</sup> Because of the greater strength at their disposal, Hunnic leaders could now widen their ambitions; and the old strategic order, whereby they were used against unwanted immigrants on Roman soil, collapsed.<sup>4</sup> As the joint expedition gathered in Sicily, Attila and Bleda launched the first of their major invasions across the Danube.

The first direct result of this crucial change in the stance of the Huns was to secure North Africa for the Vandals. Many of the eastern troops in Sicily had been drafted from this frontier, and had to return. In consequence, Aetius was forced to accept the Vandals' latest conquests in 442, recognizing their control over Proconsular Africa, Byzacena, and western Numidia. He received back the poorer and now devastated provinces ceded to the Vandals in 435 (Map 4).<sup>5</sup> The richest lands of the western Empire were thus lost to it, and the legislation of Aetius' regime from the 440s shows unmistakable signs of financial crisis. In 444, an imperial law openly admitted that plans for a larger army were being frustrated by the fact that revenues were not even large enough to feed and clothe existing troops: a statement justifying the introduction of the *siliquaticum*, a new sales tax of about 4 per cent.<sup>6</sup> Just a few months previously, large numbers of the bureaucrats had lost their exemptions

1. Best account: Maenchen-Helfen, *World of the Huns*, pp. 108 ff.; cf. Stein, *Bas Empire*, pp. 324–5; Zecchini, *Aetio*, pp. 171 ff.

2. Hydatius, 119 (capture of Merida: AD 439), 121–3 (fall of Seville, Baetica and Carthaginiensis: AD 440–1), *CM*, ii. 23–4.

3. By the time of Attila, the sources no longer mention other ranked kings (cf. *supra*, p. 11, n. 3). Conquering other tribes expanded the manpower of Hunnic armies: e.g. Jordanes, *Getica*, 38. 198–201, 50. 259–61; Priscus, ed. Blockley, fr. 49. See further Mommsen, 'Aetius', 524–6; Thompson, *Attila*, pp. 43 ff.; Harmatta, 'Dissolution', 292 ff.; Maenchen-Helfen, *World of the Huns*, pp. 94 ff.

4. Cf., amongst others, Mommsen, 'Aetius', 526; Stein, *Bas Empire*, pp. 334–5.

5. Maenchen-Helfen, *World of the Huns*, pp. 108 ff.; Courtois, *Les Vandales*, pp. 173 ff. Taxes in the returned provinces were reduced to one-eighth: *N. Val.*, 13.

6. Ibid. 15 of September 444 to January 445; cf. *ibid.* 24 of 447.

from the recruitment tax (*N. Val.* 6. 3 of 14 July 444), and other efforts had been made in 440 and 441 to cut back on tax privileges and corruption. The regime was desperate enough for cash to increase taxation of the landowning, bureaucratic classes, on which it depended for political support.<sup>1</sup>

The rest of the 440s saw both east and west attempt to resist the overt aggression of Attila's Hunnic empire. The campaigns of these years had many serious effects: both halves of the Empire lost lands in Pannonia to the Huns, and both suffered from wide-ranging Hunnic razzias. But Attila never came close to conquering either half of the Empire, defeated in one case by the walls of Constantinople, and, in the other, by the coalition Aetius put together for the battle of the Catalaunian Plains in 451.<sup>2</sup> And just as direct Hunnic hostility towards the Roman Empire was far less significant than the indirect effect of forcing a whole series of immigrants across the frontier, so, as I hope to demonstrate in the final part of this paper, were these Hunnic victories of the 440s far less dangerous to the western Empire than the very sudden disappearance of Hunnic power after Attila's death in 453. A subsequent civil war between his sons allowed groups subject to the Huns, such as Gepids and Goths, to reassert their independence; and by the late 460s the remnants of Attila's Huns were themselves seeking asylum inside the eastern Empire.<sup>3</sup> This dramatic collapse of Hunnic power brought in its wake a final crisis for the Roman Empire in western Europe.

The most immediate effect of the Hunnic civil war was that the Emperor Valentinian III felt no further need of Aetius, whom he is said to have assassinated personally on 21–2 September 454. He was himself murdered the next March by two of Aetius' bodyguards.<sup>4</sup> More barbarian groups, now released from Hunnic thrall, such as the Rugi opposite Noricum, also started to press their demands on the Roman state.<sup>5</sup> Of much more fundamental importance, however, was the fact that Hunnic military power could no longer be used to enforce a blanket policy of military containment towards the immigrants already established in

1. Privileges: *ibid.* 10. 1 (AD 441), 10. 1. 3. Corruption: *ibid.* 7. 1–2 (AD 440 and 442). Unjustified exemptions: *ibid.* 4 and 10 (440 and 441). Stein, *Bas Empire*, i, 337–8, argued from these laws that Aetius conspired with leading landowners to keep the land tax down against the interests of the state; but see B. L. Twyman, 'Aetius and the Aristocracy', *Historia*, xix (1970), 480–503; Zecchini, *Aetio*, ch. 10. All these analyses take a simplistic view of political faction: R. J. Weber, 'Albinus: The Living Memory of a 5th-Century Personality', *Historia*, xxxviii (1989), 472–97, at 491–7; cf. *infra*, p. 31.

2. Best account: Maenchen-Helfen, *World of the Huns*, pp. 108 ff.; cf. Thompson, *Attila*, chs. 4–6; Altheim, *Attila*, chs. 5–6. Stein, *Bas Empire*, pp. 334–6, was highly critical of Aetius' conduct of the wars, but see, e.g., Zecchini, *Aetio*, ch. 11; O'Flynn, *Generalissimos*, pp. 98–100; U. Tackholm, 'Aetius and the Battle on the Catalaunian Fields', *Opuscula Romana*, vii (1969), 259–76.

3. Maenchen-Helfen, *World of the Huns*, pp. 143 ff.; Heather, *Goths and Romans*, pp. 228–9, 246–9; cf. Thompson, *Attila*, ch. 6; Altheim, *Attila*, ch. 7.

4. Sources as *PLRE*, ii, 28. Resentment of Aetius' domination surely lay behind this; the two had just agreed a marriage alliance which would have cemented Aetius' long-term influence.

5. In the short term, this was more a problem for the east, but the Ostrogoths, forged out of ex-Hunnic subjects, eventually carved out a kingdom in Italy: Heather, *Goths and Romans*, pt. 3.

western Europe. Not only was the Huns' power in the process of being extinguished, but the western Empire, as we have seen, was itself chronically short of funds and could perhaps no longer have afforded to pay them; it may anyway have been politically difficult to re-employ the Huns after the devastation they had so recently caused. Whatever the precise reason, no further Hunnic forces were employed in the west after Aetius' death, and a fundamental change had to follow in the nature of the political game being played. In particular, rules of eligibility were fundamentally revised.

The traditional players – at least in the first instance – remained. As we shall see, the eastern Empire continued to play a significant political role; so too did the Roman military. The Gallic army is prominent, particularly under Aegidius in the 460s after the death of Majorian;<sup>1</sup> the Italian army underlay the influence of Ricimer;<sup>2</sup> and the forces of Dalmatia provided a solid power-base between 450 and 480 for Marcellinus and his nephew Julius Nepos.<sup>3</sup> These main western army groups were prone to internal faction, but were all separate agents which had to be reconciled individually to imperial regimes.<sup>4</sup> In the same way, leading members of the Roman landed elite, especially the senators of Italy and southern Gaul, remained politically important. Indeed, some recent studies have even explained internal political faction within the western Empire in terms of rivalry between them,<sup>5</sup> and there is some evidence that more regional solidarities did emerge in the fifth century. In particular, there was an unprecedented tendency for Gallic senators to hold the top jobs in Gaul, and Italian senators those in Italy: the result, seemingly, of two parallel, but unrelated developments. First, the loss of their holdings elsewhere drove traditional Roman senatorial families back on their Italian properties and the Senate of Rome. Second, the Council of the seven Gallic provinces, re-established in 418, provided a similar political forum for Gallic senators, where important Gallic events such as the proclamation of the Emperor Avitus took place (*infra*, page 32).<sup>6</sup>

1. References as *PLRE*, ii. 12. The *comites* Nepotianus (*ibid.* 778), Paul (851–2) and Arbogast (128–9) also commanded elements of this force in the 450s–70s.

2. References as *PLRE*, ii. 942–5; cf. Stein, *Bas Empire*, pp. 381–95; O'Flynn, *Generalissimos*, ch. 8.

3. *PLRE*, ii. 708–10 and 777–8 respectively; cf. F. Wozniak, 'East Rome, Ravenna and Western Illyricum, 454–536 AD', *Historia*, xxx (1981), 351–82, at 353–63.

4. The precise nature of these forces is a separate question. The army of Italy was seemingly a mixed barbarian force by 476; cf. *PLRE*, ii. 791. Likewise, Gregory of Tours, *Historiae*, 2. 12, reports that Aegidius was king of the Franks for eight years, suggesting that this tribe may have provided many of his troops. But in 443 levies of actual recruits were still being drafted (*N. Val.*, 6. 2), and Roman troops existed after 450 in Noricum: *V. Severinus*, 4. 1–4, 20. 1 (Eng. trans., Library of the Fathers). Similarly, some Gallic Roman units perhaps survived into the Frankish era: Procopius, *Wars*, 5. 12. 16 ff.; cf. B. Bachrach, *Merovingian Military Organisation* (Minneapolis, 1972), p. 15. A maximalist view of Roman military survival is H. Elton, 'Defence in Fifth Century Gaul', in *Fifth Century Gaul*, ed. Drinkwater and Elton, pp. 167–76.

5. Twyman, 'Aetius and the Aristocracy', 484–7; Mathisen, *Roman Aristocrats in Barbarian Gaul*, ch. 2; id., 'Avitus, Italy and the East in AD 455–456', *Byzantion*, li (1981), 232–47.

6. Allocation of jobs: J. Sundwall, *Weströmische Studien* (Berlin, 1915), pp. 8–9, 21–2. On the historical processes: Matthews, *Western Aristocracies*, esp. pp. 331 ff., 356 ff. On Avitus, see *infra*, p. 32.

But the major families north and south of the Alps remained inter-related,<sup>1</sup> and the Gallic Council was refounded just as the Goths were being settled in Aquitaine, to attract Gallic elites away from the Gothic military power to which some had already rallied (*supra*, page 22). The Council was thus an imperial exercise in limiting centrifugal tendencies, not a revolutionary Gallic soviet.<sup>2</sup> Likewise, senators in both Italy and Gaul continued, typically, to be landowners with interests in one or a series of localities, where there was every chance that they would be in competition with one another. It is thus not surprising to find Italian senators scheming against other Italians, and Gauls against Gauls,<sup>3</sup> nor that very immediate interests tended to surface in moments of crisis. Sidonius' resentment of his native Clermont being traded by the Emperor Nepos to the Goths in return for Provence is a famous example.<sup>4</sup> To characterize landowning elites as Gallic or Italian and suppose that this defines a political stance is thus misleading. Both the Roman Senate and the Gallic Council remained more gatherings of rich, interrelated, and politically powerful landowners than forums through which genuinely regional views were expressed.

All these traditional groups – eastern Empire, Roman armies, and senators – had been interested parties, of course, in western imperial regimes of the first half of the fifth century (and, indeed, of the fourth). To their number after c. 450, however, were added the major autonomous barbarian groups now established on Roman territory: particularly the Goths and Burgundians of southern Gaul, and the Vandals of North Africa. Previously, as we have seen, Hunnic power had been used by both Constantius and Aetius to contain these groups within designated physical boundaries and minimize their political influence. When the disappearance of Hunnic power made this impossible after 453, the only viable alternative was actually to include all or some of them within the western Empire's body politic. And that is precisely what we find happening – with disastrous consequences – after 454.<sup>5</sup>

The first move of Petronius Maximus, for instance – immediate successor of Valentinian III – was to win Gothic support: a close

with refs. I am unconvinced by the claim of H. Sivan, *Ausonius of Bordeaux: Genesis of a Gallic Aristocracy* (London, 1993), esp. pp. 6–27, 142–7, that Ausonius' chain of personal patronage connections already amounted to a recognizably Gallic aristocracy by the mid-fourth century.

1. Matthews, *Western Aristocracies*, pp. 338 ff.; S. J. B. Barnish, 'Transformation and Survival in the Western Senatorial Aristocracy, c. AD 400–700', *P[apers of the] B[ritish] S[chool at] R[ome]*, xxxiii (1988), 120–55, at 134–5; T. S. Mommaerts and D. H. Kelly, 'The Anicii of Gaul and Rome', in *Fifth Century Gaul*, ed. Drinkwater and Elton, pp. 111–21.

2. Heather, 'The Emergence of the Visigothic Kingdom', 91–2.

3. E.g. G. E. Max, 'Political Intrigue during the Reigns of the Western Roman Emperors Avitus and Majorian', *Historia*, xxviii (1979), 225–37, at 225–31; Weber, 'Albinus', 491–3.

4. *Ep.*, 7.7: Sidonius' works ed. and Fr. trans. A. Loyen (Paris, 1960–70); cf. C. E. Stevens, *Sidonius Apollinaris and his Age* (Oxford, 1933), pp. 158–9.

5. A similar analysis in F. M. Clover, 'The Family and Early Career of Anicius Olybrius', *Historia*, xxvii (1978), 169–96, at 171. The Franks were not united enough before Clovis to constitute a major power-block; likewise the Suevi were too busy trying to survive the onrush of Gothic power (*infra*, p. 33).

associate, Avitus, being despatched to Toulouse to court the Visigoth Theoderic II.<sup>1</sup> Perhaps the best example of the sea change in western politics, however, is Avitus himself. While he was still in Toulouse, news came through that Maximus had been killed in the Vandal sack of Rome (455). Avitus took his place, being proclaimed Emperor first by the Goths, and then by Gallo-Roman senators at Arles on 9 July 455. The regime quickly took off in Gaul, where it combined Goths, Gallo-Romans, and Burgundians, but the bandwagon failed to roll in Italy, whose army, under Ricimer and Majorian, remained implacably hostile. The eastern Empire also withheld its recognition.<sup>2</sup> Ricimer's forces were powerful enough, indeed, to defeat and depose Avitus, who died soon after, and most subsequent western imperial regimes took the form of Ricimer plus a variety of front-men; he never sought the throne himself. This would suggest that the Italian army was too powerful for any regime to function without it as a central player. Nevertheless, Ricimer's army was not by itself sufficient, and every imperial regime after Valentinian III also attempted to include senators (Gallo-Roman and Italian), Goths, and Burgundians.

This fundamental change in the nature of political activity from regimes independent of the immigrant groups to regimes which included them – a direct result of the disappearance of the Huns as an outside force – had important consequences. No group of supporters was ready (nor previously had any of the more traditional power-blocks ever been ready) to back a regime without some kind of pay-off. One effect of including immigrants in governing coalitions, therefore, was to increase the numbers of those expecting rewards, most obviously involvement in the running of the Empire. Burgundian kings took Roman titles, for instance, while the Visigoth Theoderic II attempted to order affairs in Spain.<sup>3</sup> The Vandals' intervention in Italy in 455 should likewise be read as an attempt to stake their claim in the new political order. That they sacked the city of Rome has naturally received most attention; but Geiseric, the Vandal leader, also took back to North Africa with him Eudoxia and Eudocia – respectively wife and daughter of Valentinian III – and married the daughter to his son and heir Huneric. The two had been betrothed but not married under the treaty of 442, yet in 455 Petronius Maximus married her to his son, the Caesar Palladius. Thus Geiseric intervened in Italy at least partly out of fear that a match which should have cemented the Vandals' status within the western Empire was not going to take place. Subsequent years, similarly, saw Geiseric forward the imperial claims of Olybrius who married

1. Valentinian III was murdered on 16 March, Petronius Maximus proclaimed on 17 March: *PLRE*, ii. 751. Avitus' mission: Sid. Ap., *Carm.*, 7. 392 ff.

2. References as *PLRE*, ii. 198; cf. Mathisen, 'Avitus, Italy and the East', 233; H. Sivan, 'Sidonius Apollinaris, Theoderic II, and Gotho-Roman Politics from Avitus to Anthemius', *Hermes*, cxvii (1989), 85–94.

3. The Burgundian kings Gundioc and Gundobad were both *MVM per Gallias*: *PLRE*, ii. 523–4. Goths in Spain: *infra*, p. 33, n. 3.

Placidia, the younger daughter of Valentinian, and was thus his relative by marriage.<sup>1</sup>

Involvement in imperial affairs carried great prestige, and had been sought, as we have seen, since the time of Alaric and Athaulf. The western Empire only had this prestige, however, because it was, and was perceived to be, the most powerful institution of the contemporary world. Prestige certainly incorporates abstract qualities, but the attraction of the living Empire for immigrant leaders was firmly based upon its military might and overall wealth. They wished to avoid potentially dangerous military confrontations with it, while its wealth, when distributed as patronage, could greatly strengthen a leader's position. By the 450s, however, the real power behind the western imperial facade was already ebbing away. As we have seen, Britain, parts of Gaul and Spain (at different times), and above all North Africa had removed themselves or been removed from central imperial control. The rewards – money or land, such wealth being the basis of power<sup>2</sup> – which were given after 454 to new allies from among the barbarian immigrants therefore only depleted further an already shrunken base.

Take, for example, Avitus. Under him, the Goths were sent to Spain to bring the Suevi to heel. Unlike the 410s, however, Theoderic II's troops seem to have operated by themselves, and according to Hydatius' account basically ransacked northern Spain, including loyal Hispano-Romans, for all the wealth they could muster.<sup>3</sup> This benefited the Goths, but not the Roman state; there is no indication that Roman administration and taxation were restored. Likewise the Burgundians: after participating in Spain (Jordanes, *Getica* 44. 231), they received new and better lands in Savoy, which, an enigmatic chronicle entry tells us, they divided with local senators. Another prosperous agricultural area no longer formed part of central imperial resources.<sup>4</sup>

After 454, there thus built up a vicious circle within the western Empire, with too many groups squabbling over a shrinking financial base. In political terms, this meant that there were always enough groups left out in the cold, after any division of the spoils, which wanted to undermine the prevailing political configuration. Moreover, with every

1. Sources as *PLRE*, ii. 498; cf. F. M. Clover, 'Geiseric and Atila', *Historia*, xxii (1972), 104–117, at 106–9, and id., 'Olybrius', 193 ff. On the imperialist pretensions of the Vandals: id., 'Felix Karthago', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, xl (1986), 1–16, and 'The Symbiosis of Romans and Vandals in Africa', in *Das Reich und die Barbaren*, ed. Chrysos and Schwarcz, pp. 57–7.

2. The point is unaffected by whether the Roman state granted these groups land or tax proceeds. For debate see Goffart, *Barbarians and Romans*; S. J. B. Barnish, 'Taxation, Land and Barbarian Settlement in the Western Empire', *PBSR*, liv (1986), 170–95.

3. Hydatius, 170, 172–5, 186, *CM*, ii. 28–9; cf. R. Burgess, 'From *Gallia Romana* to *Gallia Gothica*: The View from Spain', in *Fifth Century Gaul*, ed. Drinkwater and Elton, pp. 28–37, at 23–6.

4. Mar. Avent., ad a. 456. 2, *CM*, ii. 232; *Auct. Prosp.*, *Hann.*, s.a. 457, *CM*, i. 305; cf. I. N. Wood, 'Ethnicity and the Ethnogenesis of the Burgundians', in *Typen der Ethnogenese unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Bayern*, ed. H. Wolfram and W. Pohl (*Denkschriften der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften*, phil.-hist. Kl. cci, Vienna, 1990), pp. 53–69, at 65–9.

change of regime, there had to be further gifts to conciliate supporters anew. Having been granted a free hand in Spain under Avitus, the Goths then received the city of Narbonne and its territory (especially, one supposes, its tax revenues) as the price of their support for Libius Severus, Majorian's successor, in the early 460s.<sup>1</sup> Even worse, this concentration on the internal relations of the established power-blocks allowed the rise of other more peripheral forces, which would previously have been suppressed, and whose activities took still more territory out of central control. Particularly ominous in this respect was the expansion of the Armoricans, and, above all, the Franks in northern Gaul from the 460s, as increasingly independent leaders gathered around themselves ever larger power-bases.<sup>2</sup>

There were only two possible ways to break the circle. Either the number of political players had to be reduced, or the centre's financial base had to expand. This clarifies the logic behind the policies pursued by the only effective western regimes put together after the death of Aetius: those of Majorian (457–61) and Anthemius (467–72). Majorian's regime combined the sufferance of all the western army groups with the support of Italian aristocrats and a careful courting of the Gauls who had previously backed Avitus. He also won at least the temporary acquiescence of the Goths and Burgundians, and Constantinople seems eventually to have recognized him.<sup>3</sup> Anthemius was son-in-law of the former eastern Emperor Marcian, and came to Italy with an army and a blessing from the reigning eastern Emperor, Leo. His leading general was Marcellinus, commander in Dalmatia; Ricimer accepted him in Italy (they forged a marriage alliance); Gallic landowners were again carefully courted; and, at the start of his reign at least, the major immigrant groups deferred to him.<sup>4</sup> The central policy of both these regimes was to reconquer Vandal Africa, Majorian making his bid in 460, Anthemius in 468.<sup>5</sup> Victory in either of these wars would have renewed imperial prestige, but, more important, would have removed from the political game one of its major players, and, perhaps above all, restored to the rump western Empire the richest of its original territories.

1. Hydatius, 217, *CM*, ii, 33.

2. Franks: James, *The Franks*, pp. 64 ff. Armorica may have seen substantial immigration from Britain (e.g. Riotamus: *PLRE*, ii, 945), on top of an indigenous population which had already shown separatist tendencies: *supra*, p. 25.

3. See generally O'Flynn, *Generalissimos*, pp. 106 ff. Majorian's commanders in Gaul, Aegidius and Nepotianus, mounted effective operations (*PLRE*, ii, 12 and 778), and Marcellinus from Dalmatia was involved in his Vandal expedition (*ibid.*, p. 709). On his relations with Gallic aristocrats and barbarian groups, see R. W. Mathisen, 'Resistance and Reconciliation: Majorian and the Gallic Aristocracy after the Fall of Avitus', *Francia*, vii (1979), 597–627. Constantinople: Stein, *Bas Empire*, pp. 374–5; Max, 'Political Intrigue', 234–6; O'Flynn, *Generalissimos*, pp. 185–6, n. 18.

4. Anthemius himself: *PLRE*, ii, 96–8. Marcellinus accompanied him to Italy in 467 and was named Patrician in 468 (*ibid.*, pp. 709–10). Ricimer: O'Flynn, *Generalissimos*, pp. 115 ff. On Anthemius in Gaul, Stein, *Bas Empire*, pp. 389–90; O'Flynn, *Generalissimos*, p. 118.

5. Cf. Sidonius' panegyrics for the two, respectively *Carm.* 5 (esp. 53–118, 305–53, 582 ff.) and *Carm.* 2 (esp. 346–86 and 478 ff.).

Both Vandal expeditions failed, and as a result both regimes fell apart.<sup>1</sup> But what if either had succeeded? Particularly in 468, a really major expedition was put together,<sup>2</sup> and the later success of Belisarius shows that reconquering North Africa was not inherently impossible. There was, so to speak, a window of opportunity. Buoyed up by victory and the promise of African revenues, a victorious western emperor could certainly have re-established his political hold on the landowners of southern Gaul and Spain, many of whom would have instinctively supported an imperial revival. Sidonius, and the other Gallic aristocrats who organized resistance to Euric, for instance, would have been only too happy to reassert ties to the centre.<sup>3</sup> Burgundians, Goths, and Suevi would have had to be faced in due course, but victory would have considerably extended the active life of the western Empire. The failure of the expeditions foreclosed the possibility of escaping the cycle of decline. With the number of players increasing rather than diminishing, as the Franks in particular grew in importance, and with the Empire's financial base in decline, the idea of empire quickly became meaningless, since the centre no longer controlled anything anyone wanted. In consequence, the late 460s and 470s saw one group after another coming to the realization that the western Empire was no longer a prize worth fighting for. It must have been an extraordinary moment, in fact, when it dawned on the leaders of individual interest groups, and upon members of local Roman landowning elites, that, after hundreds of years of existence, the Roman state in western Europe was now an anachronism.

The first to grasp the point seems to have been Euric the Visigoth. After the Vandals defeated Anthemius, he quickly launched a series of wars which, by 475, had brought under his control much of Gaul and Spain. There is a striking description of his decision to launch these campaigns in the *Getica* of Jordanes:

Becoming aware of the frequent changes of [western] Roman Emperor, Euric, King of the Visigoths, pressed forward to seize Gaul on his own authority.

This extract captures rather well what it must have been like suddenly to realize that the time had come to pursue one's own aims with total independence.<sup>4</sup> The correspondence of Sidonius Apollinaris likewise shows members of the Roman landowning elite of southern Gaul transferring their allegiance piecemeal to Euric's colours at much the same time: some had taken stock of the terminal decline of the Empire as early as the 460s; others, like Sidonius himself, did not accept the

1. Majorian was deposed by Ricimer after his defeat (*PLRE*, ii. 703), while Anthemius' defeat allowed Ricimer to assassinate his main supporter Marcellinus: O'Flynn, *Generalissimos*, p. 117.

2. References as *PLRE*, ii. 213; cf. Courtois, *Les Vandales*, pp. 199 ff.

3. Sidonius: *infra*; similarly men in Spain such as Hydatius who had previously looked to the centre for help (cf. *supra*, p. 25, n. 3).

4. Jordanes, *Getica*, 45. 237; cf. Wolfram, *History of the Goths*, pp. 181 ff.



situation until the mid-470s.<sup>1</sup> Euric's lead was followed at different times by the other interested parties.

The eastern Empire, for instance, abandoned any hope in the west when it made peace with the Vandals, probably in 474.<sup>2</sup> As we have seen, Constantinople had previously viewed North Africa as the means of reinvigorating the western Empire. Making peace with the Vandals was thus a move of huge significance, signalling the end of attempts to sustain the west; diplomatic recognition as western emperor was subsequently granted to Julius Nepos, but he never received any practical assistance.<sup>3</sup> That the western Empire had ceased to mean anything dawned on the Burgundians at more or less the same time. Gundobad, one of the heirs to the throne, played a major role in central politics in the early 470s; a close ally of Ricimer, he helped him defeat Anthemius, supported the subsequent regime of Olybrius, and, after Ricimer's death, even persuaded Glycerius to accept the throne in 473.<sup>4</sup> Sometime in 473 or 474, however, he 'suddenly' (as one chronicler put it) left Rome.<sup>5</sup> Possibly this was due to his father's death, or perhaps he just gave up the struggle; either way, he never bothered to return. Events at home were now much more important than those at the centre, which now, of course, was the centre no longer.

The army of Dalmatia made one final attempt to sponsor a regime when Julius Nepos marched into Italy in 474, but one year later he left again – definitively – in the face of the hostility of Orestes and the army of Italy.<sup>6</sup> Fittingly, it was the army of Italy which was the last to give up. In 475, its commander Orestes proclaimed his son Romulus Emperor, but within a year lost control of his soldiers. Not surprisingly, given all the resources which had by now been seized by others, it was shortage of money which caused the unrest. Odovacar was able, therefore, to organize a *putsch*, murder Orestes, and depose Romulus Augustulus.<sup>7</sup> He then sent an embassy to Constantinople which did no more than state the obvious: there was no longer any need for an emperor in the west.<sup>8</sup> With this act, the Roman Empire in western Europe ceased to exist.

1. Heather, 'Visigothic Kingdom', 91–3; cf. Mathisen, *Roman Aristocrats*, chs. 11–12.

2. Malchus, ed. Blockley, fr. 5, dating to between February 474 and Zeno's exile in January 475, therefore most likely mid-474; cf. Courtois, *Les Vandales*, p. 204; Stein, *Bas Empire*, p. 362. The treaty is misdated to 'probably 476' at *PLRE*, ii. 499.

3. Leo supported Nepos in 473/4 before the latter seized the western throne: John of Antioch, fr. 209. But cf. Malchus, ed. Blockley, fr. 14; Nepos got no practical help between his retreat from Italy in 475 and death in 480.

4. References as *PLRE*, ii. 524; cf. Stein, *Bas Empire*, p. 395; O'Flynn, *Generalissimos*, pp. 121 ff.

5. John Malalas, ed. Bonn, pp. 374–5; otherwise *PLRE*, ii. 524.

6. References as *ibid.* 777.

7. References as *ibid.* 811–12. Cf. Procopius, *Wars*, 5. 1. 5–8. The troops demanded 'one-third of the lands of Italy'; what this means is debated: *supra*, p. 33, n. 2.

8. Malchus, ed. Blockley, fr. 14; despite the opening sentence, the rest makes clear Odovacar's responsibility for the initiative.

That the Huns and other outside, 'barbarian', groups were a fundamental cause of western imperial collapse is not a novel conclusion.<sup>1</sup> The real contribution of this paper to scholarly debate, outside matters of detail, lies in three main lines of argument. First, the invasions of 376 and 405–8 were not unconnected events, but two particular moments of crisis generated by a single strategic revolution: the emergence of Hunnic power on the fringes of Europe. This was not a sudden event, but a protracted process, and the movements of the Huns provide a real unity and coherence to thirty-five years of instability and periodic invasion along Rome's European frontiers in the later fourth and early fifth centuries.

Second, while some sixty-five years separate the deposition of Romulus Augustulus from these invasions, they are, nonetheless, intimately linked. The regular crises for the Empire in intervening years represent no more than the slow working-out of the full political consequences of the invasions, with the events of 476 marking the culmination of the process whereby the after-effects of invasion steadily eroded the power of the western Roman state. The loss of territory to the invaders – sometimes sanctioned by treaty, sometimes not – meant a loss of revenue, and a consequent loss of power. As the state lost power, and was perceived to have done so, local Roman landowning elites came to the realization that their interests would best be served by making political accommodations with the outsiders, or, in a minority of cases, by taking independent responsibility for their own defence. Given that the Empire had existed for four hundred years, and that the east continued to prop up the west, it is not surprising that these processes of political erosion, and of psychological adjustment to the fact of erosion, took between two and three generations in the old Empire's heartlands of southern Gaul, Italy, and Spain (even if elites in other areas, such as Britain, were rather quicker off the mark). Despite the time-lag, the well-documented nature of these processes substantiates a very direct link between the period of the invasions and the collapse of the Empire. There was no separate additional crisis. Simply, the overwhelming consequences of the arrival, inside the body politic of the western Roman state, of new military forces, with independent political agendas, took time to exert their full effect.

A third line of argument has concerned the paradoxical role of the Huns in these revolutionary events. In the era of Attila, Hunnic armies surged across Europe from the Iron Gates of the Danube towards the walls of Constantinople, the outskirts of Paris, and Rome itself. But Attila's decade of glory was no more than a sideshow in the drama of western collapse. The Huns' indirect impact upon the Roman Empire in

1. Cf. the analyses of Jones, *Later Roman Empire*, ch. 25; or (famously) A. Piganiol, *L'Empire Chrétien*, 325–395 (2nd edn., Paris, 1972), conclusion and esp. p. 466: 'La civilisation romaine n'est pas morte de sa belle mort. Elle a été assassinée.'

previous generations, when the insecurity they generated in central and eastern Europe forced Goths, Vandals, Alans, Suevi, Burgundians across the frontier, was of much greater historical importance than Attila's momentary ferocities. Indeed, the Huns had even sustained the western Empire down to c. 440, and in many ways their second greatest contribution to imperial collapse was, as we have seen, themselves to disappear suddenly as a political force after 453, leaving the west bereft of outside military assistance.<sup>1</sup>

I would like to finish by trying to place these lines of argument in broader historical perspective. Taken together, they indicate firmly, of course, that it was a foreign policy crisis which brought down the western Empire, and thus cast further fuel on long-raging fires of debate over whether it was internal or external factors which caused the fall of Rome. Indeed, there exists a vast secondary literature – what Peter Brown once labelled the 'sacred rhetoric' – which would argue precisely the opposite, seeing internal social, economic, and psychological developments as fully explaining imperial collapse. According to this view, the balance of power on the frontier was broken by progressive Roman enfeeblement, rather than by developments in areas beyond Rome's control.<sup>2</sup>

Transformations within the Roman world must obviously be taken into account when we look at the ability of outside groups to create increasing mayhem inside its borders. Despite possible appearances, the argument of this paper is itself very far from monocausal, since internal and external factors obviously interrelate. On a very basic level, the economic, demographic and other resources of a society fundamentally explain its success or failure in the face of outside threat. If the Empire had had a sufficiently large and wealthy population, it would have been able to resist even the new forces unleashed by the Huns. More particularly, as we have seen, the appearance of barbarian powers actually within the Empire's borders, in the fifth century, opened up a pre-existing fault line in the relationship between imperial centre and local Roman landowning elites. The centre relied on a mixture of constraint and reward to focus the loyalties of landowners, some of them many hundreds of miles distant, upon the Empire. The new barbarian powers of the fifth century undermined the ability of the Empire to prop up the position of its local supporters, to reward them, or even to constrain

1. These arguments can be compared with that of Jones (*supra*, p. 37, n.1) who argued that barbarian pressure forced the Empire to tax itself into extinction, or Paganini (*ibid.*), who felt that the Empire fatally weakened itself by disarming the bulk of its population.

2. P. Brown, 'The Later Roman Empire', *Economic History Review*, 2nd ser. xx (1967), 327–43, reprinted in his *Religion and Society in the Age of St Augustine* (London, 1972), pp. 46–73. Surveys of imputed causes, including, in some cases, extracts from relevant authors: e.g. L. White Jr. (ed.), *The Transformation of the Roman World: Gibbon's Problem after Two Centuries* (Berkeley, 1966); A. Demandt, *Der Fall Roms: Die Auflösung des Römischen Reichs im Urteil der Nachwelt* (Munich, 1984); K. Christ, *Der Untergang des römischen Reiches* (Darmstadt, 1986); D. Kagan (ed.), *The End of the Roman Empire* (3rd edn., Lexington, MA, 1992).

their loyalty.<sup>1</sup> The Empire thus fell apart as local landowners found alternative methods to guarantee their elite status, making accommodations with the new powers in the land.

Even so, it remains very much to the point to ask a hypothetical question. What would have happened had barbarians not invaded the Empire *en masse* in the face of the Hunnic threat?<sup>2</sup> Despite continued attempts of late to stress the importance of internal factors, there is still not the slightest sign that the Empire would have collapsed under its own weight.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, a great body of recent (and not so recent) research in two separate areas would collectively support the contention of this paper, derived from a close examination of the sequence of events, that it was developments beyond, rather than within, the imperial frontier which upset the prevailing balance between Rome and its neighbours. There is no space here to deal with either fully, but brief summaries can at least set an agenda for further debate.

First, there have been substantial reappraisals of different aspects of the later Roman Empire, whose cumulative effect, to my mind, has been to overturn the 'sacred rhetoric'. The fourth-century Empire was not socially rigid, economically stagnant, culturally dead, or politically dislocated to an obviously greater degree than earlier Roman societies. Much, of course, was problematic about the late Roman world, but perfect societies exist only in historians' imaginations. Recent studies have revealed that there was no fundamental dislocation in the rural economy, the power-house of the Empire;<sup>4</sup> that trade was flourishing in a far from demonetized economy;<sup>5</sup> and that local elites were participating in imperial structures in unprecedented numbers.<sup>6</sup> Traditional classicists' prejudice has also given way – in some cases, at least – to a

1. This was never easy, see e.g. Heather, 'New Men for New Constantines'. Distance certainly compounded the problem; it is surely no accident that Britain, furthest away from the centre, required special attention – three military expeditions – even in the fourth century, when relatively few Britons are known to have been prominent in imperial service: for references, see *supra*, p. 27, n. 2.

2. Always a problem for those favouring internal causes; cf. Averil Cameron, *The Later Roman Empire, AD 284–430* (London, 1993), p. 191.

3. J. A. Tainter, *The Collapse of Complex Societies* (Cambridge, 1986), esp. ch. 5, has argued that the Roman Empire was but one of a whole series of empires through historical time which have collapsed under the weight of their own increasingly complex organization. K. Randsborg, *The First Millennium A.D. in Europe and the Mediterranean: An Archaeological Essay* (Cambridge, 1991), esp. ch. 8; cf. id., 'Barbarians, Classical Antiquity and the Rise of Western Europe: An Archaeological Essay', *Past and Present*, cxxxvii (1992), 9–24, has argued that the Empire was based upon an unsustainable exploitation of its ecological resources. Neither study tackled the historical detail (Tainter's anthropological study relying entirely on secondary sources), and no proof has yet been offered that ecological exhaustion, something of great importance in the late twentieth century, has any real relevance to the fourth.

4. See now on the west especially T. Lewit, *Agricultural Production in the Roman Economy, AD 200–400* (Oxford, 1991), esp. ch. 9. This is in line with a well-established body of material showing rural prosperity in the eastern Mediterranean and North Africa, which started with the seminal work of G. Tchalenko, *Villages antiques de la Syrie du Nord. Le massif du Bélus à l'époque romaine* (Paris, 1953–8).

5. A good introduction with references (though far from exhaustive) is C. Wickham, 'Marx, Sherlock Holmes, and the Late Roman Economy', *JRS*, lxxviii (1988), 183–93.

6. Matthews, as *supra*, p. 27, n. 1; cf. Heather, 'New Men for New Constantines'.

fuller appreciation of the cultural dynamism generated by the incorporation of Christianity within the existing political and social edifice.<sup>1</sup>

On a second front, archaeological investigations have also revealed a total transformation in the nature of Germanic societies in the first three centuries or so AD. Causes are still a matter for debate, but agricultural output and economic sophistication both grew exponentially, generating in their wake profound social change. In particular, differentiation in status and wealth expanded markedly, creating much more pronounced social hierarchies.<sup>2</sup> All this is consonant with the literary evidence, which shows the existence of much larger political entities and of real dynasties among at least some Germanic groups of the fourth century. Demonstrably true of Goths on the Danube, it also seems to be the case with the Franks and Alamanni of the Rhine frontier. Fourth-century Alamannic society threw up a succession of leaders with pre-eminent power – Chnodomarius, Vadomarius, and Macrianus being described as such by Ammianus – and Roman policy was precisely directed towards containing the threat they posed: kidnapping them at banquets being a preferred approach.<sup>3</sup> These new, larger entities, as might be expected, acted more assertively towards the Roman state. In the aftermath of a Roman civil war, for instance, Chnodomarius actually attempted to annex Roman territory (and was matched in this by some Frankish groups), and the later 360s and early 370s saw both Alamannic

1. The various works of Peter Brown, from *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography* (London, 1967) to *Power and Persuasion in Late Antiquity. Towards a Christian Empire* (Madison, WI, 1992), are pre-eminent, but not isolated, in the anglophone world. W. V. Harris, *Ancient Literacy* (Cambridge, Mass., 1989), pp. 285–322, has argued for a marked decline in literacy in the Empire in the period before the barbarian invasions, but is very unconvincing; cf. (amongst others), M. Vessey, 'Literacy and Literature, AD 200–800', *Studies in Medieval and Renaissance History*, n.s. xv (1992), 139–60, at 149–152. A powerful French tradition, especially in the persons of J. Fontaine and H.-I. Marrou, has also been highly influential in revising estimates; a good introduction to the latter's work is *Décadence romaine ou antiquité tardive? – iii<sup>e</sup>–iv<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris, 1977). The emergence of Syriac, Coptic, Armenian and even Gothic literary cultures in this period points to other strands of dynamism which I cannot document here.

2. For an introduction, see M. Todd, *The Early Germans* (Oxford, 1992), pt. 1. A selection of more specialized general accounts: L. Hedeager, 'The Evolution of Germanic Society, 1–400 AD', in *First Millennium Papers: Western Europe in the First Millennium AD*, ed. R. F. J. Jones et al. (Oxford, 1988), pp. 129–43; M. P. Pearson, 'Beyond the Pale: Barbarian Social Dynamics in Western Europe', in *Barbarians and Romans in North-West Europe from the Later Republic to Late Antiquity*, ed. J. C. Barrett et al. (Oxford, 1988), pp. 198–226; H. Steuer, *Frühgeschichtliche Sozialstrukturen in Mitteleuropa* (Göttingen, 1982). On social and economic developments: B. Myhre, 'Agrarian Development, Settlement History, and Social Organisation in Southwest Norway in the Iron Age', in *New Directions in Scandinavian Society*, ed. K. Kristiansen and C. Paludan-Müller (National Museum, Copenhagen, 1978), pp. 224–71; L. Hedeager, 'A Quantitative Analysis of Roman Imports in Europe North of the Limes (0–400 AD) and the Question of Roman-Germanic Exchange', *ibid.*, pp. 191–216; W. A. van Es, *Wijster, a Native Village beyond the Imperial Frontier, 150–425 AD* (Palaeohistoria, vol. xi, 1967); M. Gebuhr, 'Zur Definition älterkaiserzeitlicher Fürstengräber vom Lubow-Typ', *Prähistorische Zeitschrift*, li (1974), 82–128; G. Rau, 'Körpergräber mit Glasbeigaben des 4. nachchristlichen Jahrhunderts im Oder-Weichsel-Raum', *Acta Praehistorica et Archaeologica*, iii (1972), 109–214.

3. Chnodomarius: AM, 16. 12 (esp. 16. 12. 23); Vadomarius: *ibid.*, esp. 21. 3. 4–5; Macrianus: *ibid.*, 28. 5. 8 ff., 29. 4. 2–7.

and Gothic groups demand (and succeed in establishing) less subservient diplomatic relationships.<sup>1</sup>

Taken together, these entirely separate areas of research suggest that any substantial change in the strategic balance of power was prompted by the growing strength and cohesion of Germanic groups, not the enfeeblement of the Roman Empire.<sup>2</sup> Even so, the effects of those changes should not be overstated. Germanic groups were stronger in the fourth century; but when it came to direct confrontation, the Roman Empire was still overwhelmingly victorious in the vast majority of cases.<sup>3</sup> And this, perhaps, finally allows us to bring the role of the Huns in the destruction of the western Empire into clear focus. Individually, the new Germanic powers were still no match for the Roman state in the fourth century. By themselves, they could generate some adjustment in relations along the frontiers, but were not about to pull the Empire apart. The most important effect of the Huns, therefore, was to make sufficient numbers of these new Germanic powers, which were not themselves politically united, act in a sufficiently similar way at broadly the same time. If ambition had prompted just one new dynast to invade the Empire on his own, his fate would have been the same as that of Chnodomarius, crushed by Julian at Strasbourg (or, indeed, of Radagaisus). The Huns, however, induced too many of these more substantial groups to cross the frontier in too short a space of time for the Roman state to be able to deal with them effectively.<sup>4</sup> The balance of power on the frontier was already swinging away from the Empire, but only within a limited arc. By creating an accidental unity of purpose among Rome's neighbours, the Huns shattered frontier security, and set in motion processes which generated – out of unprecedented combinations of outside military power and existing local Roman elites – a new political order in western Europe.

*University College London*

PETER HEATHER

1. Heather, *Goths and Romans*, pp. 114–21, on both Goths and Alamanni; especially AM, 30. 3, on Valentinian I's new treaty with Macrianus. On the Franks, see James, *The Franks*, ch. 2; cf. AM, 16. 3, 17. 8.

2. Cf. A. Demandt, *Die Spätantike. Römische Geschichte von Diokletian bis Justinian, 284–565 n. Chr.* (Munich, 1989), pp. 486–92.

3. The battle of Hadrianople stands out, and was obviously some kind of fluke; cf. p. 15, n. 3. On the Rhine, once mobilized, the Romans won a series of victories, none greater than Strasbourg (AM, 16. 12); and Julian dominated the Alamanni and Franks very generally afterwards: AM, 17. 1, 8, 10, 18. 2.

4. Indeed, subsequent Roman aggression further compounded the problem by prompting disparate invading elements to come together to create still larger groups. The so-called Ostrogoths and Visigoths, as well as the Vandals by the time they conquered North Africa in the 430s, were all new and much larger political units created in the course of the Migration Period: see Heather, *Goths and Romans*, ch. 1 and conclusion.